

“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.

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."

Paul wants us to remember 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 trust there is 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 kindness in Christ! See 1:6a. Says O'Brien,

"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

"Nothing in my hand I bring Simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to Thee for dress: Helpless look to Thee for grace;

Foul I to the fountain fly: Wash me, Savior, or I die."

(Augustus Toplady, 1740-1778).

Here Paul says 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! There is no faith lest it be the gift of God to us.

During the last century, in the worst slum district of London, there was a social worker whose name was Henry Moorehouse. One evening as he was walking along the street he saw a little girl come out of a basement shop carrying a pitcher of milk. She was taking it home. She was only a few yards from Moorehouse she slipped and fell. The pitcher fell on the pavement and broke into ten pieces pouring the milk into the gutter. The little girl began to cry as if her heart would break. Moorehouse quickly stepped up to see if she was hurt. He helped her to her feet, saying, "Don't cry, little girl." But there was no stopping her tears. She kept repeating, "My mammy'll whip me; my mammy'll whip me."

Moorehouse said, "No, little girl, your mother won't whip you. I'll see to that. Look, the pitcher isn't broken in many pieces." As he stooped down beside her, picked up the pieces, and began to work as if he were putting the pitcher back together, the little girl stopped crying. She had hope. She came from a family in which pitchers had been mended before. Maybe this stranger could repair the damage. She watched as Moorehouse fitted several of the pieces together until, working too roughly, he knocked it apart again. Once more she began to cry, and Moorehouse had to repeat, "Don't cry, little girl. I promise you that your mother won't whip you."

Once more they began the task of restoration, getting it all together except for the handle. Moorehouse gave it to the little girl, and she tried to attach the handle, but, naturally, all she did was knock it down again. This time there was no stopping her tears. She would not even look at the broken pieces lying on the pavement.

Finally Moorehouse picked the little girl up in his arms, carried her down the street to a shop that sold crockery, and he bought her a new pitcher. Then, still carrying her, he went back to where the girl had bought the milk and had the new pitcher filled. He asked her where she lived. When she told him, he carried her to the house, set her

down on the step, and placed the full pitcher of milk in her hands. Then he opened the door for her. As she stepped in, he asked one more question, "Now, do you think your mother will whip you?" He was rewarded for his trouble by a smile as she said to him, "Oh, no, sir, because it's a lot better pitcher than the one we had before."

That illustrates the gift of God. We had been made in the image of God, but that image has been shattered in the fall of our father Adam. When the Lord Jesus came into the world it was not to help us stick together the broken parts of our lives but by his free gift of grace to give us new hearts and make us new creations - new wineskins able to contain his new wine. We have gained more blessings than our father lost. That little girl had done nothing to gain the kindness of Henry Moorehouse. She could pay him nothing. He helped her solely because it pleased him to do so.

What she got was far better than what she'd lost.

What we lose is sin and its dominion over our life. What we gain is Jesus Christ! Salvation is by the free gift of God.

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).'"

John Murray preaching to his students on this theme and said at one point, "saved by good works, or saved unto good works." What's the difference? Just two little prepositions, what's the difference between them? They represent all the difference between heaven and hell. "Saved by our good works," and we are lost people. "Saved unto good works," and there is hope for the vilest.

Martin Luther was a young man who had every reason to trust in his good works. This is what he once said, "I was a good monk and kept my order so strictly that I could claim that if ever a monk were able to reach heaven by monkish discipline I should have found my way there. All my fellows in the house who knew me, would bear me out in this. For if it had continued much longer I would, what with vigils, prayers, readings and other such works, have done myself to death." He spent hours in prayer and in confessing all the sins he could think of and wore a cruel hair shirt that irritated all his skin, and he lashed himself with a whip. Yet by all this he could not find a rest. He was in despair until he grasped the gospel. He was saved by the blood of Christ alone. He saw that his righteousness was in Christ alone.

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.

The who we are of Scriptures show us what we do. When we really look hard at these things, we know this is God's work in us for His glory. This is not what we were before we knew Christ.

Christ describes His disciples in the Gospels as those who fed the hungry, they gave the thirsty something to drink, they clothed the naked, they visited the sick, and went to prison to help those locked up behind bars for Christ, they invited people into their homes all in the name of Christ. They were devoted to one another in brotherly love; they honored one another above themselves; they were patient in affliction and faithful in prayer. They shared with God's people in need. They practiced hospitality. They mourned with them that mourn. They lived in harmony with other Christians They associated with people of low position. They did not repay evil for evil. They attempted to live at peace with everyone. They did not take revenge. They overcame evil with good. They bore the burdens of the weak. They were good Samaritans. They submitted themselves to the higher authorities.

Because they had been made new creations they lived lives of good works. Christ will say to them, "Because you did these things to the least of these my brethren you have done them to me." That is what grace does in all who have true saving faith. There can be no true doctrine of assurance that does not contain some element of self-examination to check whether my life matches up in good works to those described by the Bible as characteristically Christian.

The Book of Acts and passages in the Epistles prove these things to be true in the early church. How we live today should be proving this.

And we must take into account that this transcends social status.

"God prepared in advance for us to do" (v.10). 'Us' - that is, we Christians from the smallest to the greatest. There is no room for class warfare in the culture of Christ.

This does not mean that Christians get it all right all of the time but the ethic of the believer is so far removed from those who do not know Christ that when the body of Christ is living at it should there is a remarkable difference between us and people without Christ.

Everyone who has been saved by grace, and given saving faith in Christ, has been created to do God-prepared good works. If this is not true of you then what spiritual prospects do you have, how can you please God, how can you participate in the body of Christ, His church and participate in being a display for the glory of Christ in this present age?

Taking a big picture approach to these things, Paul takes us from the depths of human sin (dead in sin and transgressions) all the way to heavenly places—where those who were once dead in sin, are now seated and raised with Christ. Paul has made it perfectly clear that we can do absolutely nothing to save ourselves. We were dead in sin at that time when God acted upon to make us alive with Christ. This is what we mean when we speak of total depravity—not that we behave as badly as possible, but that we are absolutely unable to do anything to save ourselves, or incline God to love us, or motivate God to save us.

We are by nature children of wrath—people who are worthy of eternal punishment. Not a popular message in modern America—but this is what Paul teaches. But Paul does not leave us with the bad news of the human condition. After spelling out just how serious the human condition is (we are already dead, so it is too late for instructions, spiritual medicine or religious ceremonies), Paul abruptly interrupts his description of human sinfulness when he interjects the following— “but God, who is rich in mercy has saved us by grace, through faith.” God has given us the greatest gift imaginable. He has not only saved us (even though we can contribute absolutely nothing to our



salvation), but God now calls us his workmanship “in Christ.” God unites us to his son, he changes our lives, he makes us citizens of the age to come, and because his promise will be realized, he already sees us as seated and raised with Christ. And all of this is by grace, through faith, apart from works.

And this is what Paul means when he speaks of “the immeasurable riches of his grace.”

However, it is absolutely integral to this redemption that those lives have been touched by the grace of God are going to come across works to do this day and this week, prepared for them by God. They are going to walk in them, because if they have been prepared in advance for conversion they have also been prepared in advance for good works. The connection is inseparable. Faith without works is dead.

The most satisfying life is the one in which the Lord's people, his workmanship, are zealous in doing good works.