

Alive in Christ!

Text: Ephesians 2:1-7

Introduction:

1. Review: Paul has just prayed for the illumination and enlightenment of the Ephesian believers. One of his key desires expressed in prayer was that the Ephesians would know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power” (Vs. 19). Paul then went on to detail that power as demonstrated in the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ.
2. The Apostle now outlines how that same power has operated in our lives in saving grace. William Macdonald summarizes it perfectly, “In Eph. 1:19-23 we watched the mighty power of God as it raised Christ from the grave and crowned Him with glory and honor. Now we see how that same power has worked in our own lives, raising us from spiritual death and seating us in Christ in the heavenlies.” In Eph. 2:1-10 “Paul states how sinners, who deserve nothing but God’s wrath, become trophies of his grace.” (Harold Hoehner) These verses (Vs. 1-7) form another long sentence.
3. In this section we really see the believer’s past (Vs. 1-3), present (Vs. 4-6) and future (Vs. 7).
4. We will now study this wonderful section under 3 main headings.

I. THE PORTRAIT OF OUR FORMER LIFE (VS. 1-3)

The Apostle Paul starts by describing our lives before salvation. He gives us a full-length portrait of what we ‘were’ in time past.

A. The Condition of our Past Life (Vs. 1)

1. We were dead – we had no spiritual life and were separated from God. It refers to spiritual death, not physical death. It is a living death. This world is one vast grave-yard filled with people who are dead while they live (1 Tim. 5:6). A good illustration of this living death is the prodigal son who was described by the Father upon his return as “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:24, 32)
 - a. Man is a tripartite being – body, soul and spirit. Because of sin, our spirits are dead even if we are living in the realm of the body and soul. Every one without Christ is dead, the only difference between men is the degree to which they have decayed!
 - b. Illustration: Adam and Eve died spiritually the very day they took the forbidden fruit; they were cut off from God. Gen. 2:16-17 “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: **for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.**” The devil came and in essence told Eve that she could really live if she went her own independent way from God. In reality, it would end in spiritual and physical death.
2. We were defiled – we were dead in “trespasses and sins”

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- a. 'trespasses' = the violation of a definite law (Ironsides). It is "more than an inadvertent mistake. It is a conscious and wilful action against God's holiness and righteousness." (Hoehner) "The word means a slip or fall. It is used for a man losing the way and straying from the right road. A trespass is taking the wrong road when we could take the right one." (Richard Hester) Illustration: A no trespassing sign.
- b. 'sins' = the word is "a shooting word. It literally means a miss. A man shoots his arrow at the target, but the arrow misses; that is hamartia. Sin is the failure to hit the target of life; the failure to be what we ought to be: to miss the glory of God." (Hester) "Romans 3:23 expresses the truth plainly. The mark or target was the glory of God. Man was created to glorify God. His attempt, where the attempt is made, to live a life pleasing to God, falls short of the target." (Wuest)

B. The Course of our Past Life (Vs. 2)

Our past lives were lived according to and dominated by...

1. The Sins of this World (Vs. 2a)
 - a. 'wherein' refers back to the "trespasses and sins" in the previous verse. The word means "in which". The idea is "in which trespasses and sins ye walked."
 - b. 'walked' = our conduct, way of life. It is not that we occasionally slipped up, we lived our lives in the realm of sin and corruption.
2. The System of this World (Vs. 2b)
 - a. 'course' = the age. The English word 'course' means "the path, route, or channel along which anything moves." Our lives were dominated and directed by the spirit of this present sinful age.
 - b. Trench defines this word as "All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again to inevitably to exhale."
 - c. "this world" = "the satanically organized system that hates and opposes all that is godly" (Hoehner). This world system is made up of both political and religious elements but it is all a part of that one world system that at heart is opposed to God and His way of salvation.
 - d. Challenge: As born again, blood washed children of God, our lives are no longer to be shaped and moulded by this present age. We are called to walk in separation from it!
3. The Spirit of this World (Vs. 2c)
 - a. "the prince of the power" = a description of Satan and the domain of his authority. He is called "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). Christ called him "the prince of this world" (John 16:11). In the temptation of Christ, Satan offered Him the "kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matt. 4:8), revealing the control and power he has over this world system. 1 John 5:19 reminds us that "the whole world lieth in wickedness."

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- b. “of the air” = “the lower, denser atmosphere as opposed to the rarer atmosphere above the mountain tops. The kingdom of Satan is in this lower atmosphere where we human beings are...The unsaved order their behavior according to his dictates and those of his demons.” (Wuest)
 - c. “the spirit that now worketh” = the principle or power that comes into men from Satan, the spirit that is operative in the unsaved. (Wuest) The word ‘worketh’ is the word ‘energy’ and means “operative, to be at work”. Satan is pictured in 1 Peter 5:8 as a roaring lion, on the move and on the prowl. Satan has much influence in the lives of the lost. They are “taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26).
4. The Standards of this World (Vs. 2d)
- a. “children of disobedience” = disobedience is what characterized our lives before we were saved. Sin started with disobedience (Rom. 5:12, 19).
 - b. Note the link between being “children of disobedience” (Vs. 2) and “children of wrath” (Vs. 3).

C. The Conduct of our Past Life (Vs. 3)

1. The People of our Conduct (Vs. 3a)
- a. “among whom” = refers back to the “children of disobedience” in the previous verse. Before we were saved, we lived and moved in this same lost world.
 - b. ‘conversation’ = behaviour, manner of life, lifestyle.
2. The Practice of our Conduct (Vs. 3b)
- The word ‘fulfilling’ has the idea of doing, performing and accomplishing. Our lusts were carried out in action. We indulged ourselves in the following:
- a. The lustful desires of our flesh – the world lives by the mantra, “if it feels good, do it”. This is the outworking of our sinful nature. We live in a hedonistic¹ society where pleasure is the chief end and goal of life. The word ‘lust’ means “strong passion or desire” and the word ‘desire’ has the idea of “desires that come from the emotions”. The life of the unsaved is swayed by the emotions rather than the reason. (Wuest)
 - b. The lustful desires of our minds – the sins of the thoughts and reasoning processes. Sins such as pride, self-love, secret lust and so on. F.B. Meyer warns, “It is as ruinous to indulge the desires of the mind as those of the flesh. By the marvellous gift of imagination, we may indulge unholy fancies, and throw the reins on the neck of the steeds of passion – always stopping short of the act. No human eye follows the soul when it goes forth to dance with satyrs (forest gods) or to thread the labyrinthine maze of the islands of desire. It goes and returns unsuspected by the nearest. Its credit for snow-white purity is not forfeited. It is still permitted to watch among the virgins for the Bridegroom’s advent. But if this practice is unjudged and

¹ Hedonism is “the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the highest good.” (Dictionary.com)

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unconfessed, it marks the offender a son of disobedience and a child of wrath.”

3. The Problem behind our Conduct (Vs. 3c)
 - a. “were by nature” = the word ‘nature’ refers to what is innate. The reason we sin the way we do is because we inherited a sinful nature from Adam (Rom. 5:12, 19). We were simply living according to the dictates of our fallen, depraved nature. We are sinners by nature and practice. To illustrate, a dog behaves like a dog because it has a dog’s nature. Praise God when we get saved, God imparts to us a new nature, the new man “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24).
 - b. “the children of wrath” = because of our sin, we were under the righteous wrath of God. John 3:36 “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but **the wrath of God abideth on him.**”
 - c. This dark, bleak picture forms the backdrop for the display of God’s amazing grace.
 - d. Challenge: Does this describe you? If you are not yet saved, if you haven’t been born again, this is your condition.

II. THE POWER OF OUR FATHER’S LOVE (VS. 4-6)

Despite our sinful, depraved condition, God had compassion on us, reached down and rescued us.

A. The Intervention of His Compassion (Vs. 4a)

1. “But God” = what glorious words! God took the initiative in salvation. Without His gracious intervention we would have been left in our sins and to suffer the eternal wrath of God for those sins. We were sinners on our way to hell “but God”! We were lost in the darkness “but God”! We were slaves to sin and Satan “but God”!
2. This wonderful conjunction ‘but’ can be traced in the Scriptures in relation to our salvation:
 - a. Romans 5:7-8 – “For when we were yet without strength...**But God** commendeth his love toward us...”
 - b. 1 Timothy 1:12-15 “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord...**but** I obtained mercy...”
 - c. Titus 3:3-7 “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish...but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...”

B. The Description of His Compassion (Vs. 4b-5a)

1. Mercy – consider two points about God’s mercy.
 - a. The Definition of Mercy – it means to take pity on someone, to show compassion. It means “kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them” (Strong’s). Mercy is not giving me what I deserve. Grace is giving me what I do not deserve. Aren’t you glad God took pity on you as a lost sinner and that rather than giving you the just wrath you deserved, He gave His life for you?
 - b. The Depth of His Mercy – God is described as being “rich in mercy”. This is another one of the Divine riches in Ephesians.

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We have already read of “the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7) and the “riches of glory” (Eph. 1:18) and now we have the “riches of his mercy”. God didn’t show you a little mercy; He showed you an abundance of mercy. The word ‘rich’ means ‘exhaustless’.

2. Love – consider three truths presented about God’s love for us.
 - a. The magnitude of His love – “For his great love”. The word ‘for’ means “because of, on account of” and gives the reason why God showed mercy. He showed mercy because of His great love toward us. This love is a “love that seeks the highest good in the one loved” (Hoehner).
 - b. The moving of His love – “wherewith He loved us”. The word ‘wherewith’ means “with which” (Webster). God’s love was active towards us. Despite our sin, He loved us. One of the greatest needs of the human heart is to be loved. There is no love like the love of God.
 - c. The marvel of His love – “Even when we were dead in sins”. What a marvellous and glorious statement. This is the mystery of Divine love that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8). It’s not that God looked at our lives and said, “I am pleased with their efforts and achievements. They are on my side so I will send my Son to die for them.” The opposite was true. We were ‘enemies’ (Rom. 5:10) and “alienated and enemies” in our “mind by wicked works” (Col. 1:21).

C. The Action of His Compassion (Vs. 5b-6)

We have had a description of who God is and now we see what God did for us through His Son Jesus Christ. We have been:

1. Quickened together with Christ (Vs. 5b)
 - a. The word ‘quickened’ means “to cause to live, to make alive, to give life”. Do you see the picture? We were dead in sin, walking in the way of the world, fulfilling our own lustful desires but in mercy God made us alive in Christ. You were a sinner dead now you are a saint alive!
 - b. This is what it means to be born again (John 3:1-7). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the **Spirit** is spirit.”
 - c. Illustration: Christ’s raising of the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17). “And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, **Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.**” (Vs. 14)
 - d. “(by grace ye are saved)” = The Apostle then adds this little parenthesis to remind us that our salvation was made possible by God’s grace.
 - i. The word grace means “unmerited, undeserved favour.” Grace means “salvation apart from any merit or works on our part. Grace means that God does it all for Jesus’ sake!” (Wiersbe)
 - ii. The word ‘saved’ means “to deliver, rescue from danger.” Interestingly, it is in the perfect tense which describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. We are

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saved “once for all” not ever needing to be saved again. It means “we are now in a permanent saved state as a result of saving action in the past.” (Hester)

- iii. “Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works.” (Wiersbe)
2. Raised together with Christ (Vs. 6b)
3. Seated together with Christ (Vs. 6c)
4. Summary: As a believer, because I am in Christ, God sees me as one who died with Christ, was buried with Christ, raised with Christ, ascended with Christ and seated with Christ.

III. THE PURPOSE OF OUR FUTURE LIFE (VS. 7)

The word ‘that’ introduces the grand purpose of it all. God saved us that in the ages to come He might continue to unfold for us the length, depth, breadth and height of our salvation. In eternity we will know:

A. The Revelation of God’s Grace (Vs. 7a)

1. “the ages to come” = literally “in the ages that are coming one upon another,” that is, in the eternal ages that roll in, one after another in the future eternity after the universe is returned to its pristine glory.” (Wuest) “It consists of untold millions of ages running on forevermore.” (Ironsides) As the ages of eternity roll forward, we will be further amazed and wondered at “the exceeding riches of his grace.”
2. ‘shew’ = to show forth, to display openly
3. “exceeding riches of his grace” = Look at that description of grace! It means “the surpassing wealth of his grace.” No man can fully explain it. The limitless grace of the All-Powerful, Infinite God. We will need eternity to plumb its depths. “Eternity will be filled with exciting news and activities as He displays and explains all that He has and is doing for us in our salvation.” (Hester) At the present time our understanding and appreciation of God’s grace are limited because of the constraints of our human, sinful nature.
4. Expositors: “God’s purpose is that in the eternal future, the grace of His ways with those once dead in sins should be declared and understood in all the grandeur of its exceeding riches.”

B. The Revelation of God’s Goodness (Vs. 7b)

1. ‘kindness’ = also translated ‘goodness’ (Rom. 2:4; 11:22) and ‘gentleness’ (Gal. 5:22). God has been good, gentle and kind towards us.
2. “toward us” = this kindness is directed toward us. We are the recipients of God’s overflowing grace and wonderful kindness.
3. “through Christ Jesus” = it has all been made possible through the mediatorial ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blessing of salvation is only available in Christ. Outside of Him, there is no eternal life, only eternal separation from God in hell.

Conclusion:

1. Have you been made alive in Christ or are you still dead in your sins?
2. As a Christian, is your life being influenced by this world’s system?