

Ephesians 2:4-9 "What We Are In Christ"

Last week we ended with one of the most important words this letter contains, and it's the word "BUT". But, before we go there let me bring us up to speed with what chapter 2 has in store for us. You might remember that there are 3 main thoughts here, and they are, "what we were outside of Christ", "what we are in Christ", and "what we can become as individuals in the Body of Christ."

This morning we'll be looking at the second aspect, which is, "what we are in Christ." Of course, we know that what we were outside of Christ is dead in our trespasses, or transgressions, and sins. And by trespasses and sins, we mean sins of a general kind and specific kind. In other words, those things you do that you might be unaware of as sin, and those things you do which you know are sinful.

And so, here Paul is covering all of our bases and saying that all sin accomplishes death in our lives, since the wages of sin is death, both spiritual and physical. And as we ended last week, we saw that this is a very bad place to be because being dead in our trespasses and sins means we are cut off from a relationship with our God, unable to make ourselves alive to reestablish that relationship.

This would appear to be a hopeless situation and it most certainly is if this were the entire story, BUT, there is an answer to our death, and that answer is life, the Savior of the world.

EPH 2:4-5 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."

This is an amazing truth. All men have transgressed God's law and all men are condemned because of their sin. No one deserves anything from God, and yet despite this God comes to our rescue.

What is it that would prompt God to do this? Well, we have the answer right before us. Eph.2:4b "...Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - ..."

Let's talk about this. "Because of His great love for us." What was so lovely about us that God would take sinful men, who rebel against Him and seek their own way, and extend love to them?

Well, there is nothing lovely about sinful people. There is nothing in us that attracts us to God whereby He says, 'they deserve my fellowship and therefore I must come to them and make my abode with them.'

No, all men are born in sin, and since sin separates us from God, and we deserve His wrath, God would be well within His righteousness to leave us in our sin to suffer His wrath. The world has this idea that all people are born without any inclination one way or the other to good or evil. It's our environment, they say, which ultimately conditions us to choose evil, not a sin nature.

And yet God tells us that this is not the case. He makes it clear that we are born into this world with a nature like Adam's, which is sinful. The psalmist wrote in PSA 51:5 "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

PSA 58:3 "Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies."

Here David is not suggesting that infants from the womb speak lies. In fact, a better translation of this verse is, "these who speak lies go astray from birth." The idea here is that we bring this sin nature with us into the world, even from birth.

If you have any doubt ask any parent with a one year old what is one of the first words they speak, other than mommy or daddy. Does anybody know that word? That's right, it's NO!, or MINE!

It doesn't take long before their little rebellious hearts begin to blossom. And it doesn't get better with time as they grow to be adults. And it's been that way since the rebellion in the Garden. After God judged this world with the flood we read this.

GEN 8:21 "...Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though *every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood*. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

And this is the grace and love we see in our text. Despite our sinfulness, and despite every inclination of our hearts, which is evil from childhood, God still has compassion on us. And the reason He has compassion on us is that He chooses to have compassion on us.

Again, there is nothing lovely about us which deserves this love and compassion, since we are sinners who are rebels without a

cause, and without a clue, as to the seriousness of this status before a holy God.

Our status before God is that we are, "by nature children of wrath", as Paul says in Eph.2:3. He put it even more graphically in his letter to the Romans when he said that we are enemies of God.

What a sad state for mankind. Yes, we are enemies of God, BUT, God being rich in mercy, because of His great love.

His love toward us is so rich that it looks beyond our sin to His Son, and makes a way out of that condition so we may share in His life as we're delivered from death. This too, Paul brings out in his letter to the Romans.

ROM 5:10 "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

His love is shown by His faithfulness to come into this world, as promised to Adam and Eve, and take our penalty for death and pay it in full. What a love that is; a love that acknowledges we are rebellious, and His enemies, and yet a love that says, I desire your fellowship despite your sinfulness and hatred of Me. And I love you so much that I will do what it takes to reestablish that fellowship by sending My Son to take your place and pay your debt.

This is the rich mercy Paul speaks of in our text in verse 4. This is the great love He extends to sinful man. He says in EPH 2:5 [that God] "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."

Notice the contrast here and the imagery Paul paints by showing how sinful and spiritually dead man is. Man cannot bring himself back to spiritual life any more than Lazarus could have willed himself to come back from the dead. And yet, in His rich mercy and great love, God makes us alive with Christ.

I like the way the NAS puts it because it says, we have been made alive, "together with Christ." In other words, just as Christ most certainly rose from the dead, demonstrating power over death and sin and the grave, we share in that same resurrection life together with Christ.

Just as sure as Jesus lives, we live in Him, as we place our faith in Him alone for our salvation. The life which Christ has is obviously

eternal, since Jesus is eternal. And if we share in Christ's life then our life in Him is eternal as well. It is a life that is not only eternal in duration, but is eternal in quality.

The same life God has we possess. We are not made little gods, but we have a God-life; a life given by God and a life which is in accord with His nature. His nature is perfect and everlasting. And one day, when we come into His very presence, we will share in that perfect nature in glory. There will no longer be any disease, no pain, no sorrow, no sin. We will be like Him as Paul says, though we will still be the creature and He the Almighty Creator.

We are so closely identified with Christ's life that Paul says in EPH 2:6 "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,..."

Now, this does not mean that we were literally and physically raised with Christ, since we have been born almost 2,000 years later. Nor does it mean that we are literally, this moment, seated with Him in the heavenly realms, because we are on planet earth.

Lots of bizarre teachings have been developed over the years to suggest that there is some sort of separation of our natures, where our spiritual body is with Christ and our physical body is here on earth.

Obviously, this cannot be since we are both body and spirit together. And Paul tells us that to be absent from the body is to then be present with the Lord. Paul also makes it clear that when we talk about ourselves it is implied that we are talking about both a physical life and a spiritual life united.

In other words, when you address me as Drew, you are addressing both the physical Drew and the spiritual Drew. In a sense, they're considered one and the same from a practical standpoint. The physical part of me will die one day, but my spirit continues to live on until reunited to my resurrected body in the future.

We don't usually make such a distinction between the physical and spiritual part of a human being until death takes actual place.

It was the same for Paul when he wrote to the Philippians.

PHI 1:23-24 "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

When people addressed Paul they were addressing the Paul they could see. But Paul makes it clear that his spirit would one day leave the body and be present with the Lord. And this is why we cannot be literally seated in the heavenly's with Christ today.

Well, then what does that mean for us today? Well, it means a great deal. It means that, as far as God is concerned, you and I, by our identification with Christ's life, death and resurrection through faith in Him, are viewed by the Father as having personally satisfied the debt and have come into communion with Him today.

We are personally identified with Christ as having been buried in the ground and personally having been raised with Christ three days later, defeating sin and death. Did we actually accomplish this? Of course not, but since we are identified with Christ, it is as though we did these things, which satisfies the Father's justice, and brings us back into a peaceful relationship with Him.

This is essentially what water Baptism expresses as an outward sign of who we are identified with. And that person is Jesus Christ. The word baptism, as I've said on several occasions, essentially means, union, fellowship, and identification.

And so when we're water baptized we are declaring that we are identified with Christ's death, we are identified with His resurrection and by implication we are identified with His inheritance which Christ secured.

This is exactly what Paul says in ROM 6:3-5 "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

What Paul is saying here is that when Christ died we died, we paid the debt we owe to God. When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised with Him defeating death and sin. It's like your favorite team. You get to say, "we won". You get to say, "we died to sin", "we rose from the dead".

There is no confusion here to suggest that we were literally there. But vicariously we were. That word vicarious is a good one because it simply means to take the place of another. And since

Christ knew us before the foundation of the world He knew us at the cross, even though we were not yet born, and He was taking our place as though we were there.

His victory is ours. We paid that debt through Jesus Christ when we placed our faith in Him alone for our salvation. He did the work, we reap the benefit as we are identified with His work through faith in Him.

And so, even though we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ. It is Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father, and yet our identification with Him puts us in the kind of relationship which is seen as being at God's right hand in Christ.

What this means is that there will be a day in the future where we will in fact be ruling and reigning with Christ. Paul makes this clear.

2TI 2:11-12 "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him."

And what we see here in our text is the assurance of that. This is the beauty of our salvation. It is a sure thing. It is as though we already enjoy all the benefits of it, even though these promises are future oriented. This is the hope we yearn for.

And as the writer of Hebrews puts it in HEB 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

We are sure of what we hope for, we are certain of what we do not yet see. And the reason for this certainty is because of who we are identified with, by faith. Just as certain as Christ rose from the dead, we are just as certain that we will spend eternity with Him.

This life begins today, even though it has future implications. This is why it's so important to look beyond what a drag this physical world can be at times. If we focus on what is physical, to the exclusion of what is enduring and everlasting, we will become earthly in our approach to this eternal relationship we have with Christ. And carnality dulls our spiritual senses.

Paul was always warning the Church about this attitude because he knew that to set our eyes on the earthly was tantamount to living in the flesh. And the only thing the flesh can produce is death.

COL 3:1-5 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

He is saying that you are now identified with eternal life. Don't get so hung up on the temporal life we have in the flesh that we can't see the hope we have before us. Because the moment we start placing all of our emphasis on this life we will begin to imitate this life and lose sight of the life we really possess in Christ.

What life are we to be showing the world? Is it not the life we have from above? How then can we perfect in the flesh what we've been given in the Spirit? Again, this is not to discount our responsibilities here on this earth, in these physical bodies. But these physical bodies are meant to be used to glorify Christ and that can't be done in a fleshly approach to a spiritual life.

The question is, how are we showing this certainty in this spiritual life? Do we actually see ourselves as ones who have died and been resurrected with Christ, who have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places? Are we trying to perform in the flesh or do we die to self that Christ might live in us?

Do people see this reality or do they see just one more human being struggling through this life with no apparent hope? Paul wants us to live in this hope in such a way that the world will desire this hope found only in Christ.

God wants to demonstrate this hope in our lives. He wants to show His kindness toward us in a way where the world takes notice. In fact, this is what our text says in EPH 2:7 "in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Think about this for a moment. God has saved you and me so that He might show Himself through the incomparable riches of His

grace extended to us. Our text says He will do this in the ages to come.

What ages? Every age since His first coming. In other words, you and I are included in our present age, to be used by God to show forth the "incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

But the ages to come are going to find their culmination in the great age, that age that follows this present evil age in which we live. Christ's answer to Peter regarding the leaving of everything to follow our Lord points this out.

Luke 18:28-30 ²⁸ Peter said, "Behold, ^awe have left ¹our own homes and followed You." ²⁹ And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, ^athere is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times as much at this time and in ^athe age to come, eternal life."

The age to come is the hope to which we look when we will finally find ourselves in an age, which by definition must include time, where the new heavens and new earth will be the dwelling place of Christ among His people. This future age is the blessed hope that Paul addressed to Timothy as he juxtaposed the present and future ages.

Titus 2:12-13 ¹² ¹instructing us to deny ungodliness and ^aworldly desires and ^bto live sensibly, righteously and godly ^cin the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the ^aappearing of the glory of ^{1b}our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

We can live righteously in this present age in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, but it must be done with a view to the future age in which our hope lies as we anticipate the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who will usher in His eternal kingdom prepared for us who believe.

But we must live in a way where the world can see this grace of God extended to us in this present age. Do they see the kindness Christ which has been extended to us, as we extend it to the world? Do they see contentment as we humble ourselves before God and His providence? Do they see trust and obedience to Christ when life is inconvenient or costly?

There is a sense in which God has placed us on a pedestal for the world to see what He has done on our behalf. This is what the imagery of a light set on a hill means. It doesn't mean that we place ourselves on some sort of pedestal to puff ourselves up or to show the world what we have done in following Christ.

No, it means that we are so thankful for the grace and mercy of God that we naturally want to point people to Christ by the way we live for Him and the way we tell the world what He did for us some 2,000 years ago on a cross at Calvary.

That is what a true light from God does. It shines on the object who gives life and light. And even the light we have to shine comes from Him because it comes from life, not death. This is why an unbeliever can't shine for Christ in the true biblical sense. They are dead in their trespasses and sins, just like we were outside of Christ.

But, as we consider God's grace toward us who believe, which is unmerited favor from God, we will be humbled to walk in obedience and love toward this gracious God who's given us life in Christ as a gift.

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

There is nothing so unbecoming than to see Christians acting as though they have a superiority complex over the world because of their relationship to Christ. It can show itself in a "holier than thou" attitude, or an aloofness to the world.

It almost seems that some Christians have lost sight of the depths of sin from which they were delivered which is why Paul begins this letter the way he does.

EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

May our memories never be so short that we lose sight of the sin we've been forgiven of. Now, admittedly, some Christians grow up in godly families and they may have little or no memory of the type of sin mentioned here in this chapter.

But, the point here is not to recount how heinous we were, but rather, we should recognize that we were all born in sin and that any sin will separate us from God. It is this realization that should humble us that we all need to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. And that's what Paul wants us to consider as we go out into this world. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

When we consider our own salvation we should remember that it was only God's grace and mercy and compassion toward us that we can even acknowledge that we have eternal life in Christ.

Again, it wasn't because we were so lovely, but in spite of that. That's why it's called grace. If you could work your way to heaven, you wouldn't need grace. And you would certainly have something to boast about. That's why Paul makes it so emphatic.

EPH 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

We are saved entirely by God extending grace to us in sending His Son into this world to die for us. But we must receive this gift of grace by faith as He extends it to us. In other words, we must stop trusting in our own good works and trust only in the perfect work of Christ.

If anyone could conceivably earn God's favor through their good works in keeping the law Paul considered himself a candidate, being a Pharisee of Pharisees and yet he tells us in 1TI 1:16 "...I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

Paul knew that nothing but grace and mercy are what he needed from God. And how that affected him was with a life of total dedication and consecration in following His Savior by faith. It affected him in a way where he saw this life with spiritual eyes which he had in Christ.

He no longer boasted in himself. He boasted in the One who gave him this undeserved life.

1CO 1:30-31 "It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

GAL 6:14 "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

You want something to boast about? Boast in your Savior of how magnificent He is, how gracious He is, how merciful and compassionate He is and how He took the penalty of sin we deserved and nailed it to the cross for our sins. But that kind of boasting is a humble approach to this world which desires to love them with the truth, extending His grace to others.

Let me end with another perspective of Paul's on this amazing grace found in Christ.

TIT 3:4-7 "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

May we live as heirs of Christ by faith in Him each day. May we show the world this love and grace as we extend it to them in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and may we shine brightly as we live in obedience to Him in the power of His Spirit who has sealed us for the day of redemption.

Don't ever forget where you came from and how you came to have this life in Christ. It's all grace, it's all God. Give Him glory and keep seeking those things above as we work for Him in this world today, knowing what the next world holds for us. Life eternal in the Son of God.