

## Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2

“ And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

# “Keeping the Past in the Past”

Last week we took a bit of a rabbit trail to consider how it is God the Father Who draws all those who were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. In a sense it was just a review of Paul’s major point in chapter one, that all the glory for our salvation belongs only to God.

- As we proclaim over our new covenant children when they are brought for baptism, we know that we love God because He first loved us!

This is why the Apostle Paul begins chapter two by proclaiming, “And you He made alive...” Or as we read in the old English, “you hath He quickened.” Now in most Bibles the words ‘he made alive’ or ‘hath he quickened’ are in italics because they are not literally in the Greek text at that point. This is not something the translators simply added, but rather is placed there to make the structure of Paul’s lengthy sentence more clear in our language. [ it stretches from 1-10! ]

Paul is going to tell us what is past, but more importantly what has now happened and stating that God is the one Who acts right upfront makes it clear where he is going. His major point is made at verse four, which is still part of his massive sentence in the original language: Looking back to the beginning of his sentence in verse one Paul continues, “4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

- So, we could ask why the Apostle did not simply begin this summary of the Good News with verse four?

There he seems to summarize all that is found in the first three verses, saying we are dead in trespasses.

- So why do we need all those early details?

Considering that question gives us instruction in two important areas...

First we must not downplay the fallen state of man, which we all share...

AND we must not dwell on the fallen state of man when the glorious Gospel has set us free:

- The past should stay in the past!

Our past, both individually and collectively as mankind is one of brokenness & separation, of sin & death.

- The Good News is that God’s people have now been restored and made alive by God’s Grace!

What the Apostle deals with right up front is what the reformers have called the depravity of man, or what I called the problem of man in the study sheet last week or what some refer to as original sin: The state in which all decedents of Adam are born in. Having a proper remembrance of the reality of what is now past in our lives will help us both in our evangelistic efforts and with the struggles with sin that we experience this side of glory.

On the first front, we simply cannot present the salvation offered by Jesus without first showing the lost state of mankind and the individual God has given us the opportunity to talk with.

We see this in Romans where the Apostle declares right up front that he is not ashamed of the power of the Gospel! But then goes on to spend two and a half chapters making the case that there are none righteous before God in this fallen world: ALL have sinned and fallen short!

- People must know that they have sinned against the One True and Holy God in order to understand and know their need for salvation.

This is what Paul does here in Ephesians, saying that God has come to help those “who were dead in trespasses and sins,”

Those who “once walked according to the course of this world”

Those who walked “according to the prince of the power of the air.”

To help us as those who “all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”

In short those who were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Now this of course should take us back to the Garden to reflect on the seriousness of man’s fall into sin.

It was not Adam alone who rebelled and was cursed, but as the Federal Head of all mankind, it changed the nature of all men and women... We are now by nature children of wrath. Without God’s gracious gift of salvation, we all face an eternity of separation from God because that is where Adam placed us all.

We see this in the first genealogy given in Genesis chapter five: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. 3 And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”

- Man is glorious because he is made in the image of God and man is fallen because he is made in the image of Adam.

This is why King David could proclaim that in sin his mother conceived him and why Jesus had to be virgin born in order to be the New Adam. As the New Adam, Jesus not only lived the perfect life that Adam should have lived, but as the Son of God was able to take upon Himself the wrath of God due to us as sinners and that is the Good News we can proclaim.

- Thus, we need a proper understanding of the fallen nature of mankind to properly share the power of the Gospel!

AND in our Christian walk, we need a proper understanding of our human nature as we struggle with sin in our lives. This understanding helps us in raising our children and in our daily lives.

Yes, all of these cute kids we have with us today were born dead in trespasses, being by nature children of wrath. It is important to remember that they, or any of us, do not come under God’s wrath because we commit a sin, but rather we commit sin because we are sinners born under God’s wrath.

However, what is also important to remember in the raising of our covenant children is that we start with Paul’s declaration, But you He made alive...”

We do not want to think of our children as little devils, or tell them over and over that they are little sinners without the comfort and assurance of the Gospel.

- They are brought to the Church for baptism and given the name of Jesus, so you can remind them that they have this new name and can be forgiven when they sin!

This is why every discipline or correction should end in confession and forgiveness with much love and peace. It is why our time of confession is always followed by the proclamation of the Gospel: We are forgiven! Just imagine how we would all feel if some week we focused on all our sins and then just moved on?

- The Apostle Paul is very honest here about the nature of fallen man and the power of sin, but the focus does not remain there!
- It also reminds us that we should not be surprised to find sin in our lives and the lives of our children.

Has anyone here ever had to teach a young child to lie? They are by nature liars, and yes even haters of God. Or looking at it from the other side, has anyone here NOT had to teach a young one to share? We are all by nature coveters and we overcome these sins only by the Grace of God as we shall learn in the coming weeks.

- The Apostle Paul wants us to clearly understand where we came from, but more importantly wants us to know where God has taken us!

We must also remember that God did not choose to skip our sanctification and take us directly from conversion to our glorified state for all eternity! This means that in the time that we spend here on earth as Saints, we still wrestle with sin and we see physical decay in our bodies, and sometimes even premature deaths.

We must acknowledge and confess the sin in our life, as Jeff has been teaching us from First John. AND even though we have the hope of glory as we will see in a moment, God has chosen to make the defeat of death the final step and thus until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus we all know that one day our spirit and body will for a time be separated. We must never doubt where we will end up, but also remember as we did last week that God uses means as He takes us on this journey.

- In this life he uses the Spirit of God and the Word of God to sanctify us day by day.

The Spirit, as Pastor Wilkins rightly pointed out recently, often uses our fellow brothers and sisters to do the work of Sanctification as well. Those can be in our family, our friends and especially our fellow church members.

- And as he pointed out it is not always those ones that we look up to, but it could well be that person we really don't like that much!
- As the Spirit does all this work of sanctification, our goal should be to keep our eyes on the prize!

We must avoid the temptation to return to our old ways, our old nature, what the Bible calls our flesh.

Jesus reminded His disciples about this with a parable He used to confront some of the religious leaders who thought sanctification came from doing outward things, like the proper washing of their hands and cups and plates. It was difficult even for the disciples to understand & so we read in Matthew 15:  
“15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.”

16 So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

So here in Ephesians chapter two the Apostle Paul is going to declare the glory & power of the Grace of God, but begins by reminding these Saints about their fallen state, a state that they must battle against until the day of their death or our Lord's Second Coming! We will spend some more time in two weeks helping to better understand this important doctrine which comes under attack in many Christian circles today. But for today I want us to remember that we are to keep the past in the past by remembering that we are forgiven and that we look forward to a glorious future as God's chosen people.

We were reminded of the importance of forgiveness in our readings from the Psalms this past week, where in Psalm 32 King David rejoices in forgiveness: Psalm 32: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man to whom Jehovah does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin... 10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in Jehovah, mercy shall surround him. 11 Be glad in Jehovah and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

The struggle against sin is a real battle this side of glory, which is why this Epistle will end with a call to take up the full armor of God! And as I pointed out, the fact that we are not immediately transported to our glorified state also means a struggle against that final enemy death:

- Death can come early through an accident or illness and death will finally come to us all as we age until the Lord returns in glory.

As Christians our hope is not in finding more cures, though we will continue to do that as the Gospel advances, or in pretending that death is not a reality. Here we have the same hope that we have in our battle against sin:

- Our sins are forgiven and we have the hope of the Gospel, and the power of the Gospel in our lives.

We must also remember that even as we walk through the valley of death that our past is behind us, our sins are forgiven and forgotten and that we will one day stand with Christ in our fully glorified state because of God's Grace.

We must never cease to marvel at the wonderful, and powerful hope that the Apostle Paul gives us in I Corinthians 15: "51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

#### Communion Meditation: Genesis 9

"<sup>8</sup> Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: <sup>9</sup> "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your <sup>[descendants]</sup> descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

<sup>12</sup> And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: <sup>13</sup> I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; <sup>15</sup> and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." <sup>17</sup> And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."