September 27

Responsive Reading: Psalm 72

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

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. [3] All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. [4] 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. [6] And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [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. [8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Gift of Faith

In our exploration of what man is taught to believe about God according to the Word of God, we have explored the topic of redemption. Two weeks ago we looked at the fact that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that applies the redemption to us that Christ bought on the cross. That is how we come to take part in our own personal redemption. Today we go on to look at this process in more detail, exploring *how* the Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption Christ bought for us.[1] The Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption that Christ bought for us by producing faith in us, and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.

As we just read in Ephesians, before this happens, we are dead: dead in our transgressions and sins. We can clearly see the results of sin in our world and in our lives. We do not live in a paradise of peace and love. We live with broken relationships, dishonesty and distrust. It's not a safe world. We must protect ourselves. God wants to change this deadness of conflict and distrust to a place of spiritual life with peace and trust – but we are not capable of doing that in our own strength. So, he offers it freely to us as a gift. But in order to welcome us into his kingdom where his paradise is being built in the hearts of men, he must clean us up – and he has ordained a beautiful way to do that. He provided the blood of his only begotten Son to cleanse us: to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

This is foolishness to the unregenerate man. But regeneration is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows us to believe and receive this truth. Jesus *is* the way, the truth, and the life. This redemption is laid upon the soul by the Holy Spirit of God. It unites us to Jesus Christ and one another. It joins us to him, making us joint heirs with him of the kingdom of God. It makes us one with him and with each other. It is a miraculous act of God.

We can be united to Christ here on earth because Jesus is everywhere in heaven *and* on earth. The mutual union between Christ and the Christian is initiated by Christ, as we read in Ezekial (36:26-27): "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." It is his loving work in us that makes us a people who feel and love and want to be obedient and pleasing to God. When the Holy Spirit applies redemption to a soul, that soul passes from death to life. This new life opens the eyes of the believer to the truth of salvation through repentance for our sins, faith in Jesus as our redeemer, and surrender to Jesus as Lord. This results in union with Jesus, as we read in 1 Corinthians (6:17): ". . . whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit." It is impossible for this union to be dissolved because God is perfectly persevering in preserving it. The Scripture compares this union to several images: a husband and a wife, the head and the body, a root and its branches, and a foundation and its superstructure.

We can say that faith is our act, but it is a gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, as we read in verse 8 this morning: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." So, how does the Holy Spirit apply to us the redemption Christ bought for us? The Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption that Christ bought for us by producing faith in us and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.

What is this effective calling? "Effective calling is the work of God's Spirit, Who convinces us that we are sinful and miserable, Who enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and Who renews our wills. This is how He persuades and makes us able to receive Jesus Christ, Who is freely offered to us in the gospel."[2]

Philippians 2:13 tells us that "it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." God is glorified by this great mercy that he has on us.

Notice the three actions of the Holy Spirit in effective calling: convincing, enlightening, renewing. The first act of the Holy Spirit is **conviction** of sin. I have never met anyone who claimed to have never sinned, or anyone who claimed to be perfect. *This* gift of the Holy Spirit seems to be widely distributed. The second function of effective calling, **knowledge of Christ**, is widespread in European and Western civilization, but it is imperfect. This knowledge is always growing in believers who follow him. The third function, the **renewal of our wills**, is quite another gift. A renewed will is *willing* to repent and believe, and give Lordship of our lives to Jesus. After that, we often need the Holy Spirit to keep renewing our wills so that we might persevere and finish the race.

These functions can be an effective guide in praying for the unsaved: pray for them to receive conviction of sin, knowledge of Christ, and renewal of their wills. Effective calling is both an external and internal process. The external call is the invitation to salvation and life in Christ that we share with others, that we hear and read about. In order to be effective, this proclamation must be activated *inwardly* by the Holy Spirit, which enables the person who hears it to embrace the gospel.

The Spirit removes our blindness, allowing us to see not only our sin, but the righteous wrath of God which has set aside the eternal misery of hell for all who refuse his gift of cleansing forgiveness. This is the work of the Holy Spirit to move our conscience to cry out, like the jailor in Acts (16:31), “What must I do to be saved?”

How do people know what sin is? They know it through the law given to them by God. He gave us the ten commandments, and many instructions in the Old Testament about righteous living. He has also given us a conscience to tell us right from wrong. The Holy Spirit enlightens our minds by pointing us to Christ. Knowing Christ and his righteousness and power renews our wills so that we can turn to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We are not able to renew our own wills. Our wills are renewed by the Holy Spirit when he puts new inclinations in us, and makes us willing to embrace Christ through faith. It is the gift of God.

This is the resurrection power of Jesus. The ultimate example of God’s power was the resurrection of Jesus. This same power brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life. We must never forget that we came from death, dead in our trespasses and sins. The idea of trespasses is that we have crossed a line, challenging God’s boundaries. Sin carries the idea that we have missed the mark, the perfect standards of God. Stott says that before God we are both rebels and failures.[3] This is the course of this world, where Satan, the prince of the power of the air, has sway over all who are in rebellion, as we all were before our conversion.

This was the old man, crucified with Jesus at the time of conversion. Yet this inherited sin nature lives on after conversion in what we call the flesh. Paul is reminding us in this passage from Ephesians that we have been delivered from that grave, and lifted up into grace. This grace has called us out and set us free. We ought to remember the bondage to sin which we have been rescued from. We do well to remember how God pursued us and did not allow us to refuse his gift. He persisted with us, and begged us to receive the free gift. Let us likewise be persistent in offering up the gift of eternal life to others.

Let us realize the essential place of prayer in evangelism. Since God initiates salvation, we may ask God to grant the ability to believe to those whom we are seeking to see saved. Spiritual life is the most important factor in life. God's Spirit and Word work on us showing us the way of life and good on one hand, or death and evil on the other. Paul concludes this passage by showing us the beautiful evidence that we are walking as his children. We have been predestined for good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do! Works have nothing to do with securing salvation, but they will be a result of the new nature that God has placed within us.

Today we have looked at how the Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption that Christ bought for us, by producing faith in us and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling. We have described this effective calling as the work of God's Spirit, Who convinces us that we are sinful and miserable, Who enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and Who renews our wills, persuading and making us able to receive Jesus Christ, Who is freely offered to us in the gospel. May these truths deepen their roots in our hearts and souls that we might worship him more, love him more, love our neighbors and the brethren more and more as we see the day approaching – and may we therefore be obedient to go and make disciples.

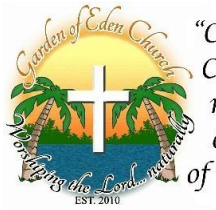
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[1] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 30.

[2] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 31.

[3] Stott, John R.W. *God's New Society, The Message of Ephesians* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

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"Come to where Christians are not ashamed of the Image of their Creator"