

Boasting Only In God

November 1, 2015 am

Ephesians 2:1-10

Sermon 1115

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Read Text: *¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in 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. ³Among 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. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

Ephesians 2 has been called one of the most grand theological treatises – ever written. In his book, *“The Doctrine of Human Depravity,”* Arthur W. Pink quotes John Gill’s comments on this text, *“The design of the Apostle in this and some following verses is to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and to set forth the sad estate and condemnation of man by nature, and to magnify the riches of the grace of God, and represent the exceeding greatness of His power by conversion.”*¹

A. The Incapability Of Man To Be Righteous (1-3).

Look at verse 1, *“And you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”* Perhaps it might be better translated, *“You were dead because of your transgressions and sins.”* This was the promise of God to Adam. In Genesis 2:17, Adam was told by God that, *“from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”* Then in Genesis 3:6 – Adam does eat from it – but yet he does not evaporate back – into the dust from which he was created. In fact – he seems to thrive – putting on clothes and hiding from danger – having children – living to the ripe old age of 930. But God’s promise did not fail. Adam did die at that very moment – in his soul. It became corrupt and rotten. And we are no less rotten and putrid – if God has yet to recreate us – into the image of His Son. We – all of us – are in union with Adam by nature. He is our federal head – he is our representative. We think the same way that he does. We do the same things that he did. We sin the same sins that he did. We have died the same death that he did. In fact – because of his sin – we were born dead – and each time we sin – we show that we agree with him – in what he did. Though physically we are alive – spiritually we are dead.

Now – in verse 2, Paul says, *“in which you formerly walked according to the course*

¹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Human Depravity* (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 40.

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.” The term “world” reminds us of – the organized system under the control of Satan – that is opposed to God. The main operating principle of the world system – is self-seeking – and independence from God. If we can use God to achieve our selfish goals – then so be it. But man is on the throne. This description is the incapability of man to be righteous.

B. The Full Capability of God To Make Man Righteous (4-7).

I’ll begin with a question – can we do anything to earn the favor of God? Paul gives us an answer with verse 4, “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.*” Paul tells us that – it is Christ that did what we could – and cannot do. We are sinners because of Adam. We continually break God’s Law. We are always seeking to do the “*will of the flesh and the mind.*” We are children of wrath. We had Adam as our federal head – our representative. When Adam fell into sin – we now need someone to take on our sin – who will give us His righteousness. We need a new federal head.

You might be asking – what is this “federal head? Dr. John L. Dagg, says, “*Adam was the federal head of the human race, and all humans are bound to him by a moral and natural union as well as a federal union. Adam’s sin was imputed to all his descendants, and thus they cannot ‘free themselves’ from ‘condemnation’ or depravity.*”² Later Dagg goes on to say, “*As Adam was the federal head and representative of his descendants; so Christ stood, in the covenant of grace, as the federal head and representative of all whom the Father gave to him.*”³ Point is – we need to be “*in Christ*” – and that is the language – Paul is speaking of here in verse 4. Now – let’s put these verses 4-7 together, “*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.*”

A continued picture – of those outside of Christ – called the world – is given to us in verse 3, 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. This shows that although believers have been delivered – from the dominating power of the flesh – we still must do battle against it – by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But unbelievers are totally dominated – by the desires of the flesh. Paul tells us in Romans 8:6-8, “*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are*

² James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), 141-142.

³ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology: A Treatise On Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1871), 271-272.

in the flesh cannot please God.” Notice the emphasis on inability – when it says, “not even able to do so.” Unbelievers – who do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit – have only one option – they live to gratify the flesh. Paul gives the condition of man – apart from God. And the problem is not just behavior – or even thoughts – it is our basic nature. 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.

C. Salvation Is By Grace Through Faith Alone (8-10).

Look at verse 8, “⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Now – to get a handle on this text – we must understand five key concepts – “saved,” “grace,” “faith,” “gift” – as opposed to “works” and “boast” or, “glory.”

First concept – To be saved – means that the Lord Jesus Christ – has rescued us from God’s wrath and judgment. As we saw in verse 1-3 – we were formerly dead in our trespasses and sins – and “*were by nature children of wrath.*” We all know that God’s wrath – is not a popular topic in our day – even in congregations – but if you get rid of this concept – you may as well throw out your entire Bible – because it is throughout both the Old and New Testaments. And it is because of sin – we all are alienated from God – in His holiness. All who are not saved – are under God’s righteous judgment – objects of His wrath.

The point is – if we are not under God’s wrath – then Jesus didn’t need to go to the cross – and we don’t need to be saved. By going to the cross – Jesus paid the penalty – that we are under – because of our sin. Paul here says, “*For by grace you have been saved...*” Either you have been saved – or you haven’t. There is no middle ground. Either Jesus has rescued you from God’s wrath – or you are not saved.

Second concept – Salvation by grace alone means that – we did absolutely nothing to earn or merit salvation. Simply defined – grace is God’s unmerited favor. If you did anything to earn it – or deserve it – it is not grace. If God owes it to us because we are a pretty good person – or we’ve tried to do the best we can – it is not grace. If God gives it to us because He foresaw – that we would believe in Him – of our own free will – it is not grace. Grace means that we get the opposite – of what we deserve. We deserve God’s wrath – because we have sinned against Him. Instead – God saves us by His grace.

Third concept – Salvation through faith alone means – that we receive salvation through trusting – in what Jesus did for us on the cross. Many people misunderstand – the nature of saving faith. Some have a sort of general – vague faith in God – whoever He may be – that is kind of like – positive thinking – they say, “*I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows! I believe in the basic goodness of people and the goodness of God. Everything will turn out for the good in the end.*” But that is not saving faith.

Saving faith includes knowledge, assent, and trust. Saving faith does not originate with us. Saving faith is different. Listen – to the natural man – the cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). The natural man cannot understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). He is blind to the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is not able to submit to – or please God (Romans 8:7-8). For the unbeliever in this darkened spiritual state to believe – God must first impart new life to him. His immediate response – is to believe in Christ by faith alone – as a gift of God.

Fourth concept – Salvation is God’s free gift to us. In verse 9 – Paul adds that God’s gift is *“not as a result of works.”* It is completely free – stemming from God’s grace alone. The Roman Catholic Church muddies the grace of God at this point – teaching that we are saved by grace through faith – but not by grace through faith alone. Rather – we must cooperate by adding our works. But the Reformers rightly argued – that we are saved by grace alone – through faith alone – in Christ alone.

Fifth concept – Salvation gives all the glory to God and none to us. Look at the end of verse 9, *“so that no one may boast.”* Or – as he puts it in 1 Corinthians 1:31 – after arguing that salvation rests on God’s choosing us, *“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”* If any part of salvation – including the faith that saves – comes from us – then we have some grounds for boasting. No – Paul says – if salvation is totally of the Lord – then He gets all the glory. Now – look at verse 10, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”*

If – as Paul here proclaims – salvation is by God’s grace alone – through faith alone – in Christ alone – for God’s glory alone – then there is hope for every sinner. Salvation does not depend on us – but rather on God – who is mighty to save. Flee for refuge – to Christ – and these wonderful verses apply to you: *“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.”*