

LECTURES ON EPHESIANS

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE BODY—ITS TWOFOLD CONSTRUCTION (Ephesians 2:1-18)

WE NOW enter upon the second division of this Epistle, entitled: The Church—Its Twofold Construction, covering chapter 2:1-18. In these verses the Holy Spirit gives us a picture of the material which God is using in the construction of His church, the mystical Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. This material consists of Jews and Gentiles who were once worthless sinners, “**dead in trespasses and sins,**” but now, through the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, have been raised from spiritual death, given new life, and baptized into this mystical Body.

The Gentiles are first described, and we have a picture of what they were by nature. My! But what a portrait God has given with regard to what we were before the marvelous transforming power of God changed us into what we are now by grace.

In the first three verses we have a life-sized portrait of our lost condition. The Spirit gives this portrait in order to show the exceeding riches of God’s grace. We cannot see the wonders of His matchless grace until we first see ourselves as we were before God’s mercy rested upon us. Let us read verses 1-3, noting carefully each statement:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

I. WHAT WE WERE

(1) *You will note that the first declaration concerning our condition is that we were “**Dead in trespasses and sins.**”*

This is the most terrible statement which God has made concerning unconverted man, the Holy Spirit portraying the condition of the natural man by this figure of speech. Other references are made where we are called “**lost sheep,**” “**wild ass,**” “**dead dog,**” but here a stronger figure of speech is used—we are described as “**dead.**”

You will remember that in Genesis 2:17 God said to Adam: “**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.**”

Of course, this does not merely mean physical death because Adam and Eve did not die physically the day on which they ate of the fruit. It refers to spiritual death, and because Adam is the federal head of the human race, it follows that Scripture bears witness to the fact, in Romans 5:12: **“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”** Death, in the Bible, never means cessation of existence or annihilation. It means *“separation.”*

- Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body;
- Spiritual death is separation of spirit and body from God.

Sin always spells separation. If you allow sin to enter a home, it will separate husband and wife. Let sin enter a business, it will separate employer from employee. Sin has entered the human heart, not only marring God’s creation but a great, impassable chasm has been put up between a holy God and His creature, man.

Note that Paul, in declaring that we are **“dead in trespasses and sins,”** is dealing with what we are and not with what we have done.

In other words, he does not discuss our acts of transgression, but our actual state. **“Dead in trespasses and sins,”** is the description of every man, woman, boy or girl, regardless of how cultured or how refined that one might be.

Someone may ask, “Do you mean that an innocent seventeen-year-old without Christ is **‘dead’**?”

Yes. When the Lord Jesus Christ talked of the necessity of the new birth and declared: **“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,”** He was talking to one of the most righteous persons of that day, Nicodemus. The righteousness of Nicodemus was the result of those repressive influences under which he and others like him had lived for years. In other words, his righteousness, like the righteousness of all other unregenerate people, was only external. Consequently, the Lord said to him: **“Ye must be born again”** (John 3:7).

Sometime ago, I was called upon to conduct two funerals in one day. The first was held in the morning and was that of a young man who had died in France and had been placed into one of those hastily-constructed graves. At the close of the war, the United States government removed his body to this country. The casket was not opened for his loved ones to see because his body was in a state of putrefaction. Had that casket been opened, no one would have raised the question as to whether or not he was dead, for the evidence would have been abundant.

In the afternoon, however, I conducted the funeral of a young woman who had died suddenly at the age of twenty-one. I stood by the side of the casket in which her body lay. There was light playing upon her features and she looked so life-like that it was difficult to believe that she was dead. Putrefaction had not set in; her features were just as they were in life, and she looked as though she were just sleeping or resting.

Standing by the casket, I thought of the funeral in the morning, making a contrast between the two bodies. When I did so, I remembered that there was a parallel as well as a contrast. They were parallel in that the girl was as dead as the man whom we had buried in the morning.

And after the service, we went to the cemetery where her body was lowered as deeply into the earth as was the man's. The application is this: It is true that we see a difference in people morally; however, that difference passes away in the spiritual realm. If a man is without Christ, though he be circumstantially good, he is just as "**dead**" as those whose lives are outwardly corrupt, and absolutely void of virtues.

Christ has said, "**He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.**" Those who have not the Son, therefore, regardless of what they may be morally, are spiritually dead, for Christ is life.

(2) *The next statement concerning what we are by nature, is that we "**Walked according to the course of this world.**"*

When we read "**world**" in the Word of God, that world does not mean the physical world or the world of man. John 3:16 says, "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**" The "**world**" is humanity. The Lord not only loved the "**world**" of man, but He loved the physical world as well. He loved the lakes, the mountains, the rivers. He loved to walk by the Sea of Galilee. No, this is not what is meant here when it is declared that we "**walked according to the course of this world.**" It refers rather to the trend of the age in which we are living. It refers to that moral scene which began with Cain when he "**went out from the presence of the Lord,**" and builded cities, and manufactured musical instruments and went in for a "happy" time in forgetfulness of God. Upon this scene the judgment of God rests and in it every unregenerate man has his existence. The man who knows not God lives in this "**world.**"

The judgment of God will fall one day upon this realm when our Lord returns in glory to reign. To walk "**according to the course of this world**" means to travel in the trend of the age, live for self, and repudiate Christ's claim upon the human heart. Do you belong to this realm, my friend?

(3) *The third statement, "**According to the prince of the power of the air**" means that we walked according to Satan.*

Before grace touched us, we were in a realm over which Satan presided and were his subjects. In these verses we have brought to light some of the most momentous and far-reaching statements God has ever revealed to us with regard to the realm of fallen humanity. We are introduced to the doctrine of the personality of Satan.

There are people, wise in their own conceits, who believe that there is no Satan, saying that he does not have personality, he does not exist. We know, however, that Satan does exist just as God exists, and the Lord Jesus Christ exists. The Bible does not argue the existence of God; neither does it argue the existence of Satan. If God exists, Satan exists. This is the only conclusion to which any human mind can come if reason dominates that mind.

A study of these teachings brings one to the conclusion that behind all of the erroneous teachings and evil there is a master-intelligence having many expressions, and that master-intelligence is Satan. Contenders for this teaching attack the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the blood atonement on Calvary with the view of deceiving man and leading him into everlasting destruction.

Let me state that the devil is not a hideous monster with a red body and forked tail, as he is often portrayed in newspapers and pictures. Man changes everything he touches. In art we always see an angel pictured in the form of a woman or a baby. The Bible always portrays angels as young men. In like manner, man has portrayed the devil as a hideous monster with horns and a forked tail, dwelling somewhere in hell and appearing at intervals for the purpose of taking someone to his lair. This tradition or false representation has led thousands of people to deny the personality of Satan and to look upon him as a joke. But Satan is not a joke. Prophecy says that toward the end of the age his power will dazzle this world, the Antichrist being his masterpiece. Foreboding shadows increase about us every day, indicating that that time nears.

Sometime in the past eternity God created three cherubim: Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel. The latter two still possess their places before the throne of God, but Lucifer was cast out of heaven. In Isaiah 14:12-14 we are told what brought about the downfall of Lucifer:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

The result of the attempt to usurp God was that he became Satan and was cast out of heaven. Evidently Jesus Christ referred to that event when He said, **“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”** (Luke 10:18).

Paul declared that Satan had transformed himself into **“an angel of light”** (cf. II Corinthians 11:14).

In Ephesians 2:2 note that Satan is declared to be the ruler of the realm of fallen spirits. In the “way” of this ruler rather than in the “way” of the Lord you and I walked before the grace of God arrested us.

*(4) But this is not all. We are declared to be the **“Children of disobedience.”***

What an expression that is—man broken loose from God! In Eden man was subject to God in all things. As a Christian he discovers that God’s way is not only the holiest way but the happiest way as well. In the Garden of Eden man was formed and surrounded by the will of God, but Satan came with the temptation: “Your life is too circumscribed. Why not throw off your allegiance to God? Come out of the circle of God’s will and become yourself as God. Why be subject to the caprice of a despot like God?” Man listened to him, disobeyed God, and in doing so undid himself and turned the world into a wilderness. Adam and his descendants became **“Children of disobedience.”**

Every unconverted man today can be thus described. Satan continues inculcating anarchy and rebellion against God in the minds of men today. You and I, my brother, were spiritual rebels before God touched us. In the language of Scripture we were **“Children of disobedience.”**

(5) In Verse 3 we read,

“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others!”

What we are determines what we do; consequently our former conduct is here described.

When we think of the meaning of the word, lust, we think of something revolting. That is not the meaning here used. Paul spoke about the desires of the **“flesh,”** whether they were worthy or unworthy. Romans 8:8 says that **“They that are in the flesh cannot please God.”** **“The desires of the flesh,”** even of the unconverted man, may express themselves in religious ways, coupled with worthy deeds such as the giving of alms or the saying of many prayers — things commended by the world. But these good things cannot commend an unconverted man to God, since he is **“in the flesh,”** and the Word says, **“They that are in the flesh cannot please God.”**

*(6) The closing words of verse 3 are a startling climax to the description concerning what we are: **“children of wrath!”***

We are subject to the wrath of a holy God in consequence of our disobedience. What a picture this is — a true photograph of every human being, Jew or Gentile, in his natural condition having committed sin and being doomed to eternal perdition, Man may deride this thought; modernists deny it, saying that man is not a sinner. He has no use for this teaching. Nevertheless, such is God’s photograph of man.

The reading of Ephesians 2:1-3 brings us to the verge of despair but that despair is lessened because the verses following show the matchless grace of God.

Sin has so completely bound man that alone there is no extricating himself. If deliverance is to be his, someone greater than sin, someone who has conquered sin, must release and deliver.

Let us summarize the six characteristics of natural man:

1. They are **“Dead in trespasses and sins.”**
2. They walk **“According to the course of this world.”**
3. They walk **“According to the prince of the power of the air.”**
4. They are **“Children of disobedience.”**
5. Their conversation is in the lusts of the flesh, or we might better say, their manner of life is in the lusts of the flesh.
6. They are **“Children of wrath.”**

In verse 4 grace steps in giving light to the picture: **“But God.”** Here is the intervention of a God full of grace and full of truth.

These two little words become wonderfully precious and sweet to a believer’s heart.

- Once we were **“Dead in trespasses and sins,”** **“but God.”**
- Once we **“Walked according to the course of this world,”** **“but God.”**
- Once we walked **“According to the prince of the power of the air,”** **“but God.”**
- Once we were **“Children of disobedience,”** **“but God.”**

- Once **“We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh,” “but God.”**
- Once we were **“Children of wrath,” “but God.”**

Without this intervention on the part of God, we would have no hope and would be cast into despair as we look into the future. But when God revealed Himself, a God of mercy, full of grace as well as truth, He came down to the place where sin had brought us and by His mighty power lifted us to the place where He has exalted His own Son, and He made us members of **“the church, which is his body.”** This church is now linked with Christ in the heavenlies and will one day be where He is to share His glory.

Note the method employed by God in relieving this scene of universal failure on the part of Jew and Gentile in verse 4. God is said to be **“rich in mercy.”** He would have to be all of this in order to show kindness to such people as are described in verses 1-3. He would have to be rich in grace as well as in mercy, for there is not one thing about man and woman there described which merits the mercy of God.

Grace is often described as unmerited mercy. It is all of that and more. But how does God show the richness of His mercy? Does He change His attitude toward the unregenerate?

Not at all. A holy God cannot change His attitude toward sin; therefore all who reject the provision of His grace continue as **“Children of wrath,”** and will someday know what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. God refers to Himself as a God **“rich in mercy,”** because His wrath was expended on the Lord Jesus Christ. Judgments had to be made; law had to be satisfied; penalties had to be paid.

God remembered justice and at the same time referred to Himself as **“rich in mercy.”** In other words, His mercy was based upon justice satisfied.

How could this be accomplished? There was only one way known even to God: that was Christ crucified.

We are living in a day when cults are all about us. They not only deny the deity of Christ and His vicarious suffering, but they emphasize His love and mercy. They say God is rich in mercy, and that is true, but they deny that which forms the basis of God’s mercy. They forget that God is a consuming fire and that the Bible is just as emphatic in making that plain as it is in declaring that God is full of love and kindness.

Let me emphasize again that God never shows mercy at the expense of justice; justice was satisfied when Christ was crucified.

Isaiah wrote, **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6). This is why we read in John 3:16: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

Because God **“so loved”** He **“gave”** His **“Son.”**

You cannot talk of God's mercy without talking of the cross. The mercy seat in Old Testament days was a part of the Ark of the Covenant, and was given that name because the blood was sprinkled upon it. Underneath the mercy seat and in the Ark of the Covenant were two tables of stone into which had been cut the Ten Commandments, the righteous demands of a holy God upon His creature, man. The mercy seat, covering the Ten Commandments, forms the throne of God illustrating the great truth to which every portion of Scripture bears witness, that God's mercy is based upon righteousness exalted. The mercy seat was a type of Calvary. Therefore, when Christ was crucified, God was glorified, justice was satisfied, the law was magnified, and sin was nullified, and the sinner justified.

Let us look again at the sparkling gems which are in Ephesians 2:4-6:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

When did He love us? Since we were saved? Since we were washed in the blood of the Lamb? Yes, He did, but His love goes back before those events. He loved us even when we were **“dead in trespasses and sins,”** and because He loved us, He devised a plan by means of which He lifted us out of the quarry of sin.

Is it any wonder then that when we turn to the opening words of Revelation we find recorded the redemption song which glorified believers sing: **“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever”** (Revelation 1:5,6)?

Note the order of the words, **“loved,”** and **“washed.”** **“Loved”** comes first. He loved us before He washed us. We must not change this order, for we read in Romans 5:8: **“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

He loved us with an everlasting love even before He looked down into the future and saw what we would become by grace.

Let me pause a moment to say to every unconverted friend that God loves you. He hates your sin, but He loves you and is endeavoring to bring you into His banqueting hall.

That is why He devised a plan culminating in Calvary.

When I was in Chicago, walking with one of the greatest Bible teachers, we passed a saloon. The keeper was outside rolling a hogshead of beer along the street. We passed on, but the man with whom I was walking, turned, went back and said, **“My friend, God loves you. Did you know that?”**

The saloon-keeper said, **“God loves me? Do you know who I am?”**

“I am a saloon-keeper. Does God love saloon-keepers?”

“Yes,” said my friend, **“God loves saloon-keepers. He hates their business, but He loves them.”**

My friend placed before that man a few, well-chosen words about the way of salvation and the provision the love of God had made, quoting John 3:16.

I watched the face of the man intently while my friend was talking of the matchless love of God, and I thought I saw a tear gleaming in his eye as he heard the story.

Love found a way to redeem my soul,
Love found a way that could make me whole;
Love sent my Lord to the cross of shame,
Love found a way, O praise His holy name!

Praise God, when Christ died; God laid all of our sins on Him, our Substitute. That is why He can show mercy.

II. WHAT WE ARE

The method by which God saves us is found in verses 5, 6:

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

There are three steps presented in the method by which He took us out of the quarry of sin and placed us in the temple of dazzling light.

Let us pause for a moment to point out again that this plan of salvation included both Jew and Gentile. “**Ye**” in verse 2 and “**we**” in verse 3 refer to Gentiles and Jews. And in verse 14 of the same chapter we read that “the middle wall of partition” has been broken down.

This means that Jews and Gentiles are saved alike.

Saved people become members of the Body of Christ by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit who raises them from spiritual death and gives them new life, and baptizes them into the Body of Christ.

We shall emphasize three words in this method by which God saves us: “**quickened,**” “**raised,**” “**seated.**”

(1) *To quicken means to give life.*

If we are dead, we need life, and that is what is given when a man accepts Christ as Saviour. God does not patch up the old life; He gives a new life, through the new birth. “**That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**” (John 3:6).

The Lord said to Nicodemus, “**Ye must be born again**” (John 3:7). This He said to explain how the new birth takes place. Christ did not explain the “how” to Nicodemus.

The process is a mystery as seen in John 3:8:

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

When Nicodemus asked, **“How can these things be?”** Christ answered by placing before him the means by which it is accomplished. **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”** (John 3:14,15). If you will go to the foot of the cross, look into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, and say to Him:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

“I believe Thou art the Son of the eternal God, and I accept Thee as Saviour,” you will not only be pardoned by Him, but you will be **“quickened”** by the Holy Spirit of God. By that process the Spirit imparts to you the very life of God. This **“quickened”** means more than *“pardoned.”* A criminal already executed may be pardoned but he remains dead.

What would happen if the government would pardon a recently executed murderer? That pardon would do him no good unless there would accompany it new life, a physical quickening. This is the very thing the Holy Spirit of God does in the spiritual realm for the believing sinner. There accompanies the pardon a new life. The believer becomes a new creature in Christ, and, as a new creature, is baptized into the Body of Christ. Having been reborn, there is no power able to destroy that new life received from Christ. All of this is included in the words, **“quickened us together with Christ.”**

The only lasting reformation, my friend; that can take place in the life of a sinner must come from this process. There is a large company of well-meaning people who continually work at the reformation of the world. This is misdirected energy. I do not hope for the reformation of man until he accepts Christ as Saviour and becomes a new creature. You cannot convert a thistle into a grapevine by transplanting it; you cannot change a corrupt tree into a good tree by lopping off the branches; you cannot change a man’s heart by changing his environment. When a man accepts Christ, he receives the very nature of God; consequently, he hates the things he once loved, and loves the things God loves.

At the close of an evening service, an appeal was given for men and women to accept Christ. Among those who accepted the call was a man addicted to the liquor habit. At the time he knelt at the penitent form he had a flask of whiskey on his hip.

After accepting Christ, he immediately walked out of the church, took the flask from his hip, threw it into the gutter, and came back into the church, praising God. No personal worker told him to do that. It was the new life expressing itself. And, my friend, that is the only way to bring about lasting reformation. That is the meaning of the word, **“quickened,”** in verse 5.

(2) *Note the word, “raised.”*

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (v. 6).

God does not save us to leave us down here in the mire of the old life. Every believer is not only **“quickenened,”** but **“raised.”**

- The quickening refers to the impartation of new life to the dead sinner’s soul.
- The raising speaks of a new realm into which he is taken or lifted.

A saved one is no longer in the realm of Satan under his domination, no longer walking **“According to the course of this world.”** A saved person is translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son and is under the domination of the risen Lord.

This is illustrated in the case of Lazarus. He was not only **“quickenened,”** but he was **“raised”** from the sphere of the dead. He came forth from the cemetery; his grave clothes were taken from him. Even the smell of the grave passed away. He took up his abode with people who were alive.

In this manner the Lord works in the human heart when He **“quickenens”** it. He says, **“Loose him, and let him go”** (John 11:44), and the habits and deeds of the new man are put on.

(3) The third word mentioned is “seated.”

We are not only **“quickenened,”** and **“raised,”** but we are made to **“sit together, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (v 6).

What does that expression **“Sit together in heavenly places”** mean?

Many people picture benches in a meeting house; consequently, we often hear men pray at the beginning of a service, **“Bless us as we sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”** This statement has no such meaning, nor does it say that we are seated with Christ. How often we hear this text quoted in that way.

One day we shall be seated with Christ, but that will not be until He returns and we are caught up to meet Him.

The text says that we are now seated in Christ. In other words, Christ is our representative, and, as such, He is seated **“Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion.”**

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

In fact, He is seated as high as God can make Him. And God views the Body, the church, with the Head. After obtaining rest in sleep, the physical body rises in the morning when the head rises, so it is in the spiritual realm.

In God’s reckoning, every believer is seated in Christ because Christ is our representative, and our life is hid in Him. That is our position. What a marvelous picture is this!

- We were **“Dead in trespasses and sins”**;
- We **“Walked according to the course of this world”**;
- We were dominated by the **“Prince of the power of the air”**;

- We were “**Children of disobedience**”;
- We “**Had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh**”;
- We were “**Children of wrath.**”

But thank God! Grace stepped in and brought salvation. This salvation included everything suggested by the three words, “**quicken**ed,” “**rais**ed,” and “**seated.**”

The word, together, means Jews and Gentiles. And, my friend, this is the material of which the church is constructed.

III. WHAT WE SHALL BE

The purpose of all of this is “**That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus**” (v. 7).

This verse fills us with wonder and amazement. It tells us what is before every child of God and what will be his ministry in the “**ages to come.**”

“**The ages to come**” refers to the future ages. It is interesting to compare Ephesians 2:7 with 1:4. In verse 4 we are carried back to the time before the “**Foundations of the world were laid,**” when we were “**Chosen in Him.**” Verse 7 takes us forward to the future eternity, and refers to what our ministry will be in those future ages.

The past eternity is linked with the future eternity and we see the church of Christ of which we are members the center of God’s eternal plan. The average Christian does not have a clear idea as to what is meant by “**ages.**”

The volume entitled, *The Plan of the Ages*, was sent forth in prayerful trust it might be used to give light on this subject. Many Christians are under the impression that we are living in the last age, and that when this age comes to an end the world will also end. This is not the teaching of the Word of God.

*** *BBB note: This book is posted on our site* ***

This age of grace will come to a close just as other ages have had an end, but the Word of God tells us that this age will be followed by another, “**the dispensation of the fulness of times**” which is the golden age or millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The millennial age will continue for a thousand years. At its close, the eternal plan will have run its course. You and I should be interested in the future ages because in Ephesians 2:7 Paul tells us that we shall have a ministry. God, through the church, will in the future ages, show forth the “**Exceeding riches of his grace.**”

The word, “**show,**” means to exhibit, or put on display. God will put on display the “**Exceeding riches of his grace,**” by making known what has been done for men and women who were poor, lost, dead sinners who received His redeeming grace. What a display that will be! We are living in an age when man likes to display the works of men and show what man is doing. But what a disappointment awaits the twentieth century civilization.

The Son of God has declared that everything not built upon Him is going to become like chaff before the “**summer threshing floors.**”

This is described in Daniel 2:34, 35 where we read:

A stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

That will be the end of this twentieth century civilization. God will then put on display the things which He desires heaven and hell should know.

He will come forth as King of kings and Lord of lords to rule over this earth. In His descent to this earth, He will be accompanied by the church which He redeemed with His own blood. Multitudes will be with Him, together with myriads of angels. The Old Testament saints will be there as well. His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives, and He will reveal Himself as the Heir to Abraham’s land, and Covenant Heir to David’s throne. More than this, He will be revealed as the Lord of the whole earth. He will fill this earth with His glory for a thousand years. At the close of this period of time the new heavens and new earth will come into existence. Eternity will have begun. Throughout those ages of eternity God will unfold the “**Exceeding riches of his grace,**” mercy and love. Are we not overwhelmed as we read verse 7? We cannot comprehend it, but it is sufficient to assure us that during the coming ages of eternity there will be no monotony.

I have often been asked the question: “What will we do in the ages of eternity?”

After a million years of eternity have passed we shall still be standing amazed at the fresh unfolding of the wonders of God’s Person, His matchless love, and grace. It will be a continual unfolding of His wisdom, grace, mercy, and love. This is illustrated in what He has done for the church.

We who were once children of the devil, are now “**quickened,**” “**raised,**” “**seated,**” heirs of God and joint-heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not only be the medium through which His grace will be shown to principalities and powers, but we will be led deeper into the marvelous things He has done for each individual. How we shall praise Him at that time!

Let us go to verses 8-10:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Again we are reminded that all that has been done for us is of grace. How often in this Epistle God emphasizes that salvation is of grace, that all that He has done for us and will do for us is unmerited mercy. These wonderful verses cut the ground from under us lest we Christians attempt human boasting or attempt to establish our own righteousness.

Paul makes three statements.

(1) *Our salvation is a present possession — “For by grace are ye saved.”*

Note that he does not say, “*Being saved.*” The work of redemption is an accomplished fact. Every believer in Christ is saved. When he gets into heaven he will not be any more saved than he is at present with regard to guilt and the penalty of sin. This can be true of you, reader, if you will put your trust in the Christ who died for our sins and rose again for our justification.

(2) *Faith is the agent of our salvation.*

Faith is the agent which lays hold of the gifts. God’s Word says: “**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life**” (John 3:16).

That message is placed within your reach. Faith is the hand which reaches out and lays hold of the gift. Faith does not save; faith lays hold. Some people have much faith, some have little faith, but the degree of faith is not what saves. Christ saves, faith lays hold on Him.

(3) *Faith is the gift of God.*

“**And that not of yourselves.**” We are, therefore, beginning to understand what grace is. God not only provides the Substitute, but He provides the faith which enables us to lay hold on Him. We must give God the glory, even for the portion of faith which we manifest and possess.

(4) “*Not of works, lest any man should boast*” (v. 9).

This is a world of boasting. Every worldly institution is permeated by it. An election time affords interest as one follows the boastings of politicians with regard to what they plan to do if elected. Heaven will be altogether different in this respect for there will be no boasting there. The song, the boasting will be, “**Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.**”

Were salvation given on any other ground except grace, heaven would be filled with boasters.

Were it given on the ground of works, such a conversation as the following might be heard in heaven:

“How did you get here?”

“I built and equipped a hospital”;

“I lived in the days of Noah and I helped build the ark”;

“I endowed a home for the aged.”

We shall not listen to conversations of that character, for we shall be there because of the grace, the love and the faith which God bestowed upon us.

We shall be there because God in His mercy chose us before the foundations of the world were laid. Therefore, my reader, if you desire to go to heaven, your going depends upon grace alone. How the world hates this way.

There are some people who, if it were possible for them to get into heaven and enjoy the privileges outlined in the Epistle to the Ephesians by paying one million dollars, would give this amount gladly and quickly. But to accept on the ground of grace the gift of salvation and go to the foot of the cross, a poor lost sinner, saying, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling,” is something they will not do.

H. A. Ironside tells the story of John Nelson, a preacher of Wesley’s time, a blacksmith before God saved him. God used him in a wonderful way to lead souls to Christ. Once he was talking to a self-righteous man who said, “I do not need your Saviour. I am all right. I live right and have done good things. I will take my chances with the rest of the people.”

Nelson replied, “Look here, my good man, if God should let you into heaven, you would bring discord there, because all of the others there would be singing, **‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing’** and you would be singing, ‘Worthy am I. Glory to me, because I lived a consistent Christian life.’ An angel hearing you sing that would throw you over the wall.”

That was a very crude way to state the truth, but it expresses the thought. Remember what David said, **“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord”** (Psalm 34:2).

Works, however, have a place in God’s plan for the believer, for Paul continues, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (v. 10). If we are created unto good works, we are then able to perform works acceptable to God. In other words, a believer is saved without works in order that he might perform good works of every kind. One of the greatest disappointments to the angels of God and one of the greatest delights to the demons of darkness is the man who declares that he is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but sits down and becomes a religious do-nothing. God has saved us to serve. In other words, we are **“Created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . .”**

Note the order again. We are not saved by good works, but **“unto good works.”**

We should go to work for Christ. In this regard let us remember the exhortation which Paul gave to Titus, chapter 3, verse 8: **“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works . . .”**

IV. THE GENTILE POSITION DISPENSATIONALLY (2:11, 12, 13)

The first ten verses of chapter two show how the Holy Spirit deals with poor, lost sinners—dealing with them individually and fashioning them into stones, and causing them to become members of the Body of Christ. Verse 11 shows how completely the finished work of Christ meets the need and how all believers are united into one Body whether Jew or Gentile. That Body becomes a living temple, made of living stones, just as the temple was made of rocks set together into one building.

The church is that Body, the temple, and we, individual believers, are the stones.

In verses 11 and 12, Paul addresses Gentiles, describing their condition in order that the mighty grace of God might the more shine forth. Notice when God desires to show the marvels of His grace, He always points to what we were by nature.

In this instance, Gentiles are called upon to remember what they once were. I thank God the Word says “**in times past**” (v. 11). What we are to remember has to do with the past. God desires not that we should forget the past but He would not have us hang it about our necks, like a millstone. Some people are so hampered by their past sins shackled to them that the devil has victory in keeping them from entering into the peace of God.

But God does not want us to remember some things in the past. But we are to remember our debt to God; we must come into the knowledge of the efficacy of the finished work of the Lord and see our changed position because of the grace of God. He desires that we take a look into the quarry of sin out of which we have been taken by the grace of God. Do that once in a while, and sing as you look, that favorite song of Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

Grace, 'tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear.

Now let us read verses 11, 12:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

What a dark picture that is, especially when we remember the other dark one in verses 1-3. When we consider these we immediately see that the description of Gentile history is entirely different from that given in verses 1-3.

In verses 1-3 we have set forth what we Gentiles were and are *morally*. This was and is true of the Jews. “**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**” The description in verses 11, 12 is from a dispensational standpoint. Morally there was and is no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles; dispensationally, there is. Paul, from this dispensational standpoint, calls attention to the dispensational position of the Gentiles, and that, together with the moral picture, presents a very dark picture.

(1) “*In the flesh.*”

We are to remember that we belong to that great mass of people who determined to corrupt themselves. The great nations, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, lived “**in the flesh.**” And they died “**in the flesh.**” But let us not forget that those “**in the flesh cannot please God**” (Romans 8:8).

(2) “*Without Christ*” dispensationally.

The great Gentile world was without Christ. They knew nothing about Him and did not care to know anything concerning Him. No promise was given to them. Israel possessed the promises. Prophet after prophet spoke to Israel concerning the coming One and concerning all of their institutions, such as the Passover, foreshadowing Christ.

- That is why our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “**Salvation is of the Jews**” (John 4:22).
- That is why He said to the Twelve, “**But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**” (Matthew 10:6).
- That is why He said to the Syrophenician woman: “**It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs**” (Mark 7:27).

She first addressed the Lord as “**Son of David.**” He did not answer her because she, a Gentile, had no claim on Him. The Son of David was sent to the Jews, and the Gentiles were looked upon as dogs by the Jews and by the Lord. He addressed this woman as a dog; nevertheless, she obtained something from God because she took her place as a dog. It is a wonderful thing to agree with Christ Jesus when He says something about us. This woman asked for crumbs.

When Israel definitely rejected Christ, then grace reached down on the day of Pentecost and grasped the Gentiles, the “**dogs,**” and placed them at the table where a greater banquet had been prepared than had been prepared for the Jews. But before Paul outlines this, he allows us, as dogs, to see a picture of ourselves.

(3) “*Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise . . .*”

We were strangers because we were not Jews; therefore we were excluded from the covenants. People who deliberately place themselves under the law in trying to keep the Sabbath, Christian Gentiles, are erring. The covenants were never given for us; they have nothing to do with us. We were in a more distressed state than Israel; we were poor, wandering outcasts.

(4) “*Having no hope, and without God in the world.*”

The literature of the old world and its people give ample proof of this statement. The condition of the world at the time of Christ proves it. We studied in the book on Romans the condition of the world when Christ came into it.

If the grace of God could and can do anything with such material as this, how wonderful it was and is!

After the description of our moral state given in verses 1-3, we saw the words, “**But God.**” Now, after the description of the Gentiles dispensationally, we see the words, “**But now.**”

“**But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ**” (v. 13).

Now we are going to see a revelation of what God is doing with all believers and how He is calling them out from the world into one Body. The word “**but**” speaks of the intervention of God, and tells us that a change has taken place with regard to our position before God.

“**We are made nigh,**” and the “**Middle wall of partition between us,**” Jews and Gentiles, has been removed. The enmity once existing has been done away.

Verses 15-17 tell how this has been accomplished:

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

In verse 15 note the words, “**in his flesh**”; in verse 16 the words, “**by the cross**”; in verse 17 the words, “**and came and preached.**” These expressions give the method whereby this marvelous transformation was accomplished. What was the motive? It was that He might reconcile the Gentiles and the Jews and form them into one Body.

- The words, “**in the flesh,**” speak of the incarnation;
- The words, “**by the cross,**” speak of His death,
- The words, “**and came and preached,**” speak of His resurrection.

The unfolding of what believers are collectively is gradually brought before us. After Paul shows the difference between the Gentiles and the Jews dispensationally, and shows what the Gentiles were morally, he declares that these same people, who were once “**Without hope, and without God in the world,**” these people who were “**In the flesh,**” and were “**Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise,**” are now “**Made nigh,**” this being accomplished by the blood of the cross, Christ becoming our peace.

It is a mistake to say that we have made peace with God. No man makes peace with God.

Once I heard about a man who wanted to do some religious work, thinking that in so doing he might earn his way to heaven. His vicar sent him to a man who had been a very wicked man, a drunkard. The man had been ill, and, while ill, had read his Bible and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

The caller asked the sick man, “Have you made peace with God, my friend?”

Whereupon the man answered, “I haven’t any peace to make, sir.”

Being much amazed, the visitor said; “You have been a very wicked man and you do need to make peace with God. Will you not do so before it is too late?”

The sick man again replied, “I haven’t any peace to make, sir, because the Lord Jesus made peace for me on the cross. I have accepted that peace purchased at such a price.”

What peace can a sinner make but to accept Him who is our peace?

The Saviour made the sacrifice to save everyone who would accept Him. The “**Middle wall of partition between us,**” Jews and Gentiles, has been broken down.

And what was the motive for this? **“That he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”** (v. 16).

We then who were once alienated are brought into living fellowship one with another. Many people lack assurance concerning this something which has taken place. They think that it is presumptuous if they claim to be sure of salvation. The Word of God says that we may have assurance. Christ preached these things; He wants us to believe them.

Read carefully verse 16, **“Reconcile both unto God in one body.”** The two classes are still included, the saved Jews and saved Gentiles. The one new man is now called the **“Body.”** Thus gradually the Holy Spirit leads us into the mystery which in the former ages was not unfolded to man. How sublime! In the first chapter of this Epistle we are taken into the council of God in the past eternity; then we are taken down into the quarry of sin where we were when God lifted us. Now we are taken into the mystery of the Body. As He, the Holy Spirit, outlines the coming things, He wishes to keep before us the fact that Christ died for us.

In I Corinthians 12:13 we read: **“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”** If you are a child of God, you are a member of the Body. You cannot be a Christian and not be a member of the Body. You cannot be a member of the Body without being baptized by the Holy Spirit. This baptism makes us members of the Body.

In these present days there are people teaching that the church is Israel and that we are of the tribe of Ephraim. The church is not Israel and we are not of the tribe of Ephraim. We are members of the Body of Christ.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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