

ENGAGE

- As you approach the text you may find these thoughts to be helpful?
 - Pastor Eric completes his series on the nature of God with this sermon on “God is Gracious.”
 - Give thought to questions regarding how God has shown His gracious nature to you.
 - Application will be shown in our knowledge, acceptance and praise for God’s gracious nature. It will also be applied in how we image the person of God by our gracious nature.

EXAMINE

Eric will also likely touch on:

1 Cor. 6:9-11

Ephesians 1:3-8

1 John 1:9

Ephesians 2:1-10

EPHESIANS 2 – GOD’S WAY OF RECONCILIATION**A. The need for reconciliation.****1. (1) Christians are alive from the dead.**

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

a. And you He made alive: The words He made alive are in italics, which indicates that they are added to the text but implied from the context. Paul wrote to believers who were made alive by God’s work.

i. Paul ended the last chapter by considering that the ultimate example of God’s power was the resurrection of Jesus. Now Paul considers what the implications of Jesus’ resurrection power are for our life.

b. Who were dead in trespasses and sins: Though Christians are now alive, they must never forget where they came from. They were dead in trespasses and sins.

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i. There are many kinds of life: vegetable life, animal life, mental life, moral life, and spiritual life. A being might be alive in one sense but dead in another. To be spiritually dead does not mean that we are physically dead, socially dead, or psychologically dead. Yet it is a real death, a “dead death” nonetheless. “The most vital part of man’s personality – the spirit – is dead to the most important factor in life – God.” (Wood) “Not in a moral sense, nor a mental sense, but in a spiritual sense, poor humanity is dead, and so the word of God again and again most positively describes it.” (Spurgeon)

ii. This touches on one of the most controversial areas in theology – in what manner, and to what extent, is a person dead before conversion? Must a person be converted before he can believe, or can there be a prior work of God to instill faith that is still short of conversion? Those who argue that man must be regenerated before he can believe like to say that a dead man cannot believe. This takes this particular description further than intended, to say that unredeemed man is exactly like a dead man, because a dead man also cannot sin.

iii. We err if we think that dead in trespasses and sins says everything about man’s lost condition. It is an err because the Bible uses many different pictures to describe the state of the unsaved man, saying he is:

- Blind (2 Corinthians 4:3-4Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- A slave to sin (Romans 6:17Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- A lover of darkness (John 3:19-20Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- Sick (Mark 2:17Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- Lost (Luke 15).
- An alien, a stranger, a foreigner (Ephesians 2:12Open in Logos Bible Software (if available), 2:19Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- A child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).
- Under the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).

iv. Therefore, in some ways the unregenerate man is dead; in other ways he is not. Therefore, it is valid to appeal to all men to believe. We need not look for evidence of regeneration before we tell men to believe and be saved. As the Puritan John Trapp wrote, “Howbeit, the natural man, though he be theologically dead, yet is ethically alive, being to be wrought upon by arguments; hence Hosea 11:4Open in Logos Bible Software (if available), ‘I drew them by the cords of a man,’ that is, by reason and motives of love, befitting the nature of a man. So the Spirit and Word work upon us still as men by rational motives, setting before us life and good, death and evil.”

c. In trespasses and sins: The idea behind the word trespasses is that we have crossed a line, challenging God’s boundaries. The idea behind the word sins is that we have missed a mark, the perfect standards of God.

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i. Trespasses speaks of man as a rebel, sins speaks of man as a failure. “Before God we are both rebels and failures.” (Stott)

2. (2-3) The life of death.

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, 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.

a. In which you once walked: At one time we lived in trespasses and sins, according to the course of this world, which is orchestrated by Satan. Satan (the prince of the power of the air) is still very much active among those in rebellion against God – the sons of disobedience.

b. You once walked: The self that once walked was the old man, now crucified with Jesus at the time of conversion. The sin nature inherited from Adam influenced the old man, but the world system and Satan do also. One might say that the influence of the old man lives on in what the New Testament calls the flesh.

i. Once walked means it should be different for those who are made alive by Jesus Christ. A dead man feels comfortable in his coffin; but if he were to be made alive again, he would instantly feel suffocated and uncomfortable. There would be a strong urge to escape the coffin and leave it behind. In the same way, when we were spiritually dead we felt comfortable in trespasses and sins; but having come to new life we feel we must escape that coffin and leave it behind.

c. Who now works in the sons of disobedience: In sin we respond to Satan’s “guidance.” The same ancient Greek verb is used in Ephesians 2:20 *Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)* for the work of Satan in unbelievers as is used in Ephesians 3:20 *Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)* for the power of God that works in believers.

d. The prince of the power of the air: This unique title for Satan speaks of his authority (prince) and his realm (the air, a way of referring to Satan’s “environment”).

i. “The domain of the air, in fact, is another way of indicating the heavenly realm, which, according to Ephesians 6:12 *Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)*, is the abode of those principalities and powers, world-rulers of this darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness against which the people of Christ wage war.” (Bruce)

ii. Satan is not the ultimate ruler, but he is a prince in the sense that “Evil men set him up for their sovereign, and are wholly at his beck and obedience.” (Trapp)

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e. We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh: We once were among the sons of disobedience, proven by our conduct. We embraced the lusts of the flesh, which are primarily perversions of the legitimate desires of human nature.

i. “The converts are to be reminded what they have been delivered from, as well as what they have been lifted into. They must be led to look down again into the pit, into the grave, from which grace called them out and set them free.” (Moule)

f. And were by nature children of wrath: Because of our surrender to the old man, the world, and the devil, we were by nature children of wrath. We rightfully deserved God’s wrath, and deserved it because of who we were by our heritage.

i. The Bible knows nothing of the idea that all men are “children of God,” except in the sense that He is our common creator (Acts 17:28Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)). Here Paul says that there is a “family” of wrath that has its children, and Jesus called the Pharisees “a family of snakes” (brood of vipers in Matthew 3:7Open in Logos Bible Software (if available), 12:34Open in Logos Bible Software (if available), and 23:33Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)) and said that their father was the Devil (John 8:44Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).

B. The process of personal reconciliation to God.

1. (4) God’s motive in reconciliation.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

a. But God... because of His great love: With but and because, Paul explained God’s reason behind reconciling man to Himself, and these reasons are found totally in God. The reasons are His rich mercy and His great love, which He focuses on us.

i. “As they were corrupt in their nature, and sinful in their practice, they could possess no merit, nor have any claim upon God; and it required much mercy to remove so much misery, and to pardon such transgressions.” (Clarke)

b. With which He loved us: We might imagine a God of rich mercy and great love who did not focus that mercy and love upon us. But behind the good news of God’s salvation offered in Jesus is the fact that this mercy and love is extended to us.

c. His great love with which He loved us: Some warp the idea of God’s great mercy and love into something that justifies our pride. Some imagine that God loves us because we are so lovable.

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Instead, God's love is so great that it extends even to the unlovely – to the children of wrath mentioned in the previous verse.

- i. Every reason for God's mercy and love is found in Him. We give Him no reason to love us, yet in the greatness of His love, He loves us with that great love anyway.
- ii. Therefore, we must stop trying to make ourselves lovable to God, and simply receive His great love while recognizing that we are unworthy of it. This is the grace secret of the Christian life.

2. (5-7) The past, present, and future of God's work of individual reconciliation.

Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

a. When we were dead: This is when God started loving us. He did not wait until we were lovable. He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses, providing nothing lovable to Him.

i. This is the requirement for being saved. You must first be dead, dead to every attempt to justify yourself before God. He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me... has passed from death into life (John 5:24 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).

b. Made us alive together with Christ: This is what God did to those who were dead in sin. He shared in our death so that we could share in His resurrection life. The old man is crucified and we are new creations in Jesus with the old things passing away and all things becoming new.

i. By grace you have been saved: Paul is compelled to add here that this is the work of God's grace, in no way involving man's merit. Our salvation – our rescue – from spiritual death is God's work done for the undeserving.

c. Sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus: This is the present position of the Christian. We have a new place for living, a new arena of existence – we are not those who dwell on the earth (as Revelation often calls them), but our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)).

i. We don't sit in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus, or at least not yet. Instead, we sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Since our life and identity is in Christ, as He sits in heavenly places, so do we.

ii. "And now we sit in heavenly places – we have a right to the kingdom of God, anticipate this glory, and are indescribably happy in the possession of this salvation, and in our fellowship with Christ Jesus." (Clarke)

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d. In the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace: In the future, God will continue to show the exceeding riches of His grace to us. God will never stop dealing with us on the basis of grace, and will forever continue to unfold its riches to us through eternity.

i. He might show: "The original implies, that the exhibition is for His own purpose, for his own glory." (Alford) This work in us reflects infinitely more on the glory of God than on our own glory, and God will use His work in the Church to display His glory throughout the ages.

ii. "From this verse it is clear that Paul fully expected the gospel of the grace of God to be preached in the ages to come. He had no notion of a temporary gospel to develop into a better, but he was assured that the same gospel would be preached to the end of the dispensation. Nor this alone; for as I take it, he looked to the perpetuity of the gospel, not only through the ages which have already elapsed since the first advent of our blessed Lord, but throughout the ages after he shall have come a second time. Eternity itself will not improve upon the gospel." (Spurgeon)

iii. "When all the saints shall be gathered home they shall still talk and speak of the wonders of Jehovah's love in Christ Jesus, and in the golden streets they shall stand up and tell what the Lord has done for them to listening crowds of angels, and principalities, and powers." (Spurgeon)

iv. The exceeding riches of His grace: "So is it with the grace of God: he has as much grace as you want, and he has a great deal more than that. The Lord has as much grace as a whole universe will require, but he has vastly more. He overflows: all the demands that can ever be made on the grace of God will never impoverish him, or even diminish his store of mercy; there will remain an incalculably precious mine of mercy as full as when he first began to bless the sons of men." (Spurgeon)

v. One way to see the greatness of the grace of God is to see how He begs man to receive it. When we offer a gift to someone and they refuse it, we are likely to allow them to refuse and leave them alone. God does not do this with us; even when we refuse His mercy He reaches into His storehouse of grace and persists with us, begging us to receive the free gift.

3. (8-10) A summing up of God's work of individual reconciliation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

a. For by grace you have been saved: Paul cannot speak of this glorious work God does without reminding us that it is a gift of grace, given to the undeserving. We are not even saved by our faith (though faith itself is not a work), but by grace through faith.

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i. We can think of water flowing through a hose. The water is the important part, but it is communicated through the hose. The hose does not quench your thirst; the water does. But the hose brings water to the place you can benefit from it.

ii. "The precise form of words here stresses two things. As consistently emphasized by Paul, it is entirely of His grace, His free, undeserved favour to mankind. Then also this salvation is presented as an accomplished fact." (Foulkes)

b. And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: The work of salvation is God's gift. Paul's grammar here indicates that the words apply to the gift of salvation mentioned in Ephesians 2:4-8 (Open in Logos Bible Software (if available), and not directly to the faith mentioned in this verse.

i. Clarke emphatically states that the original Greek is clear in noting that when it says it is the gift of God, the it referred to is salvation, not faith. The great Greek scholar Dean Alford also clearly pointed out that the this not of yourselves referred to salvation, not to faith in this passage.

ii. Yet, even our faith is a gift of God. We cannot believe in Jesus unless God does a prior work in us, for we are blinded by our own deadness and by the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4 (Open in Logos Bible Software (if available))).

iii. "But it may be asked: Is not faith the gift of God? Yes, as to the grace by which it is produced; but the grace or power to believe, and the act of believing, are two different things. Without the grace or power to believe no man ever did or can believe; but with that power the act of faith is a man's own. God never believes for any man, no more than he repents for him; the penitent, through this grace enabling him, believes for himself." (Clarke)

iv. This shows us the essential place of prayer in evangelism. Since God initiates salvation, we should begin our evangelism with asking God to do the initiating, and granting the ability to believe to those we want to see saved.

c. Not of works, lest anyone should boast: God did it not of works simply so that no one could boast. If salvation was the accomplishment of man in any way, we could boast about it. But under God's plan of salvation, God alone receives the glory.

i. "I thought Napoleon did a good thing, when, on the day of his coronation, he took his crown, and put it on his own head. Why should he not take the symbol that was his due? And if you get to heaven, one half by grace and one half by works, you will say, 'Atonement profited me a little, but integrity profited me much more.'" (Spurgeon)

d. For we are His workmanship: God saves us not merely to save us from the wrath we rightly deserve, but also to make something beautiful of us. We are His workmanship, which translates

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the ancient Greek word *poiema*. The idea is that we are His beautiful poem. The Jerusalem Bible translates workmanship as “work f art.”

i. God’s love is a transforming love. It meets us right where we are at, but when we receive this love it always takes us where we should be going. The love of God that saves my soul will also change my life.

ii. We are His workmanship, His creation – something new He has made of us in Jesus Christ. “The spiritual life cannot come to us by development from our old nature. I have heard a great deal about evolution and development, but I am afraid that if any one of us were to be developed to our utmost, apart from the grace of God, we should come out worse than before the development began.” (Spurgeon)

iii. “Our new life is as truly created out of nothing as were the first heavens, and the first earth. This ought to be particularly noticed, for there are some who think that the grace of God improves the old nature into the new. It does nothing of the sort.” (Spurgeon)

e. Created in Christ Jesus for good works: That beautiful thing God is making of us is active in good works. These are just as much a part of God’s predestined plan as anything else is. These good works are valid evidence that someone is walking as one of God’s chosen.

i. “Works play no part at all in securing salvation. But afterwards Christians will prove their faith by their works. Here Paul shows himself at one with James.” (Wood)

QUESTIONS

- What does it mean that we are saved by grace through faith? Are there any recent evidences of a lack of faith in God's grace in your life?
- In what ways do you work to be "vindicated" or shown to be "right?"
- How have you struggled to believe that God is gracious?
- At the heart level, do you truly see God as gracious, or do you try to prove yourself to God, others, or yourself?
- How can you take one step from unbelief to belief today?
- What does it look like for you to repent and believe the truth that God is gracious?
- With whom could you talk about these struggles?

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