

“But God...”: Ephesians 2:4-5

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity – Oct 18, 2020

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Ephesians 2:1-7: “And you being dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, ⁴ but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Introduction

1. In the Greek language, vv.1-7 a single sentence. Two parts, vv.1-3 (bad news), vv.4-10 (good news).
2. Last week, Craig taught us about the bad news: everyone is subject to three powerful forces (world, prince of the power of the air, flesh). Result: dead in trespasses and sins.
3. This morning, we consider vv.4-5, where Paul pivots to the good news. Paul is going to touch on some most important elements of the gospel: mercy, love, new life, grace and salvation.

Exposition

“But God”

- Contrasts with our previous state vv.1-3: “You were dead... But God made us alive in Christ”. This is what was once true; this is what is true of you now.
- As far as our personal experience goes, “But God” are the two most powerful words in the English language; the short adversative conjunction, “but,” joined to the word “God”, the loftiest conception of which human minds are capable.
- In your own life today, where do you need a “but God”?
- Paul qualifies the idea with three descriptive phrases:

“being rich in mercy”

- Qualifies it with a description of God’s nature.
- Mercy is ἔλεος (used 238x in LXX; 27x in NT). His overflowing active compassion, freely exercised, excluding all ideas of merit on our part. Cf. Rom 11:30-32; 1 Tim 1:13; Titus 3:3-5; 1 Pet 2:10.
- He could have said, “God, being merciful”. God doesn’t just have mercy, he is “rich”, πλούσιος (*plousios*) in mercy.” Paul wants to accentuate the overflowing, inexhaustible supply of God’s boundless storehouse of mercy.
- Mercy is inherent in God: essential to His nature. Cf. Ex 34:6-7. Quote by Church Father Athanasius (c. 297-373).
- One of the best examples of God’s mercy in the Bible is in 2 Chron 33:1-17: King Manasseh of Judah.

“because of His great love with which he loved us,”

- Qualifies it with a description of God’s motivation

- Paul uses this cognate accusative expression (to intensify the meaning of an idea: love – noun, ἀγάπη, and loved – verb, ἀγαπάω).
- Again, Paul could have simply said: “because He loves us”, but he instead underscores the vastness of God’s love: because of the great, *plous*, love with which he loved us. Later in Eph, in Ch 3:18: marvels at the dimensionless wonder of Gods love, and in Rom 8:38-39 Paul makes it clear that nothing can separate us from it.
- Do you see yourself as one whom God loves? Cf. 2 Sam 12:25: Jedidiah – “beloved of Yahweh”. The Apostle John clearly thought of himself this way: “the disciple that Jesus loved” 5x in Gospel (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

“even when we were dead in trespasses”

- Qualifies it with a description of our prior condition
- Same idea reflected in Rom 5:8: very rarely would someone die for a righteous man, maybe for a good man... but God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- After the three qualifiers, we come to the predicate of the sentence:

“made us alive together with Christ”

- This is the main verb governing the meaning of the passage.
- **“Made us alive together”** is a single word: συζωοποιέω. Made up by Paul and used nowhere else in Greek literature, only here and in Col 2:13.
- Meaning is profound: we, who were spiritually dead, were joined to Christ, the source of all life. As a result, we are “made alive together with Him”.
- How? Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:3-8; Titus 3:5-6)
- This spiritual reality is expressed in both of the Church’s sacraments: holy baptism and holy communion

- This is at the heart of the gospel: to be made alive by God and live in continuous communion with Him and live a new quality of life.
- This is the first of three *sun*-compound verbs in v.5-6 (*sun* - means “together with”). We’ll look at the other two next week. Cf. Col 1:12-13; Rom 6:3-11.
- Paul now interrupts himself.

“by grace you have been saved”

- “**grace**” – χάρις, is God’s “gratuitous generosity to undeserving sinners” (Andrew Lincoln). Used by Paul over 100x in his letters.
- It refers to unmerited divine help and action. The idea derives from two Hebrew word-concepts: *hen* – the favor shown by a superior to an inferior; *hesed* – God’s covenantal love and faithfulness. So, grace is God’s undeserved, unearned loving commitment to us and our welfare.
- Klyne Snodgrass: “For some reason unknown to us, but which is rooted in His nature, God gives Himself to us, attaches Himself to us and acts to rescue us. Though wrath should have come, grace comes to us instead.”
- Paul’s point here is that our salvation is all of God, so we are secure in Him (cf. Col 1:22; Col 2:13).
- “**saved**” is σώζω (*sotzo*). Of the 29x used in the NT, this is the only place where it is used in the perfect tense: past action with continuing results.
- What has God saved us from? (Cf. Eph 1:1-3; Rom 2:5; 5:9).
- We’ve come full circle.

Take aways

God is rich in mercy.
 God is great in love.
 God is full of grace.

God is strong to save.

God has given us His life in Christ.

- Which of those truths do you most need to hear today?