

## **But God...**

Ephesians 2:1 – 10

**Proposition:** The holiness of God demanded condemnation, but His love furnished salvation.

**Application:** Make progress in your Christian life by resting in what God has already done.

---

Do you prefer to hear good news first or bad news? Some Psychologists have put a scientific spin to this question. Whether you want the good news first or the bad news first depends on whether you are the giver or receiver of the bad news. If you are on the receiving end, studies show that more than 75 percent of people prefer the bad news first. If people know they are going to receive bad news, they would rather get it over with. If you are the news giver, about 70 percent would rather give good news first, then the bad news. No one enjoys giving bad news. Today I have good news, and I have bad news. I will be one of the 30% and begin with the bad news and you can be a part of the 70% who would rather first hear the bad news.

In this chapter Paul highlights our helpless and hopeless state as sinful people. He does not present the cure until he has first made clear the extent of our problem. Paul is taking on the role of a spiritual doctor – he presents the divine diagnosis then describes the divine cure. So, what is the diagnosis? Spiritual Death. What is the cause? Trespasses and sin. What is the cure? The grace and mercy of God.

### **I. The Bad News (2:1 – 3)**

*Spiritually Dead (2:1):* The divine diagnosis to our spiritual problem is summed up in one word – *dead*. In one sense we are very much alive but in another sense we may be dead. As Christians, we are physically alive but at one time we were spiritually dead. The most important part of our human nature, the spiritual, was dead to the most important person, God. Death does not mean annihilation; death does not mean we cease to exist. The Bible describes death as *separation*. When we die physically our soul is separated from our body. The Bible calls this the first death. The second death is the eternal and perpetual separation of body and soul from the presence and power of God. The Biblical term is *hell*. Even though we were made to have a relationship with God, in hell people will be left to themselves, alone, to work out an eternal, perpetual, never ending existence devoid of the power and presence of God (2 Thess 1:9). Good works cannot make us alive to God any more than dead person can bring themselves back to life. We are spiritually dead. The cause is our trespasses and sin.

*Dead in trespasses and sin:* A bad wheel alignment causes a car to drift off the road. A trespass is like a bad wheel alignment. Trespass refers to crossing the boundary, deviating from the path,

veering off the road, going astray (Isa 53:6). Our trespasses cause us to wander from the Lord. If I wanted to go to Hawaii, would I step into the waters of the Pacific and try to swim there? Even if I was a better swimmer than Michael Phelps I would still fail to reach the goal. Trespass is deviating from the path, sin is never reaching the target. When it comes to obeying God's holy and perfect will we all fall short. We may think we are doing better at it than our neighbor, but the fact is, apart from faith in Christ Jesus, our conduct is closer to the standard of sin than to the standard of God's holy law and perfect will. The Lord will not lower His standard to meet our failings. Our trespasses and sin cause a *separation* from God (Isa 59:2).

A doctor says to his patient, "*you must stop smoking, or you will get lung cancer.*" So the patient says, "*OK, I'll quit.*" And he does and he avoids getting lung cancer. Like the smoker we may say, "*I will quit my trespasses and sin. Then I will be OK.*" When it comes to sin, the quitting plan does not work. We are enslaved to sin. We cannot help but sin. Apart from faith in Christ Jesus, our way of life is to habitually wander off the road and constantly fall short of the standard. We are not able to stay on course; we are not capable of reaching the finish line. Every step we take we find ourselves moving further and further away from God. Behind death lies sin, behind sin lies the world, the flesh and the devil. Apart from Christ Jesus we are enslaved to the world, the flesh and the devil.

### *1. Enslaved (2:2 – 3)*

*According to the world:* The world refers to those values, purposes, pursuits, and pleasures that are hostile to God. The central figure of this world is me, myself and I. The world appeals to our sinful nature, but it will never answer to God's requirements. The world is a source of sin. The world is also the domain where satan achieves his purposes.

*According to the devil:* The spirit of evil, demonic spirits, have influence over the world and they work through disobedience.

- *Demons influence the world:* The world as a system of values is hostile to God, and is under the authority of satan and his demons (John 12:31). These spirits function in the unseen world and carry out their evil intent. The work of these demonic spirits is to *deceive* by making good seem evil and evil seem good and to *destroy* (John 8:44).

- *Demons work through disobedience:* Not only do these evil spirits have authority over a world system hostile to God they also work through a lifestyle of disobedience. Scripture talks about resurrection power working in and through those who believe. In like fashion, the deceptive and destructive power of the unseen demonic world works through those who reject the Lord.

Apart from the Lord Jesus we are enslaved to sin. We sin according to a world system hostile to God. We sin according to the unclean spirits active in the unseen world. And we also sin according to the flesh.

*According to the flesh:* The flesh refers to the perversion of natural desires. For instance, sex is a natural desire, sexual immorality is a perversion of that desire. Money is a necessity, but the love of money is greed. Food is essential, gluttony is a perversion in the desire for food. Sleep is required but slothfulness is a sin. Natural desires converted into sinful behaviors is what the Bible calls flesh.

Before Paul was a believer, he was considered blameless in regard to Jewish custom. Yet before coming to faith in Christ Jesus he was a child of wrath. This proves that we cannot be made alive unto God through our good works. Good works cannot not make a spiritually dead person alive to God (Isa 64:6). If our good works are filthy rags imagine what our trespasses and sins are like.

Apart from faith in Christ, we are separated from God, we are spiritually dead, because of trespasses and sin. We cannot help but sin because we are enslaved to the three sources of sin – the world, the flesh and the devil. The outcome is that if we remain in this state we are destined for wrath.

2. *Condemned (2:3c):* What is wrath? It is not a divine temper tantrum; nor is it an outburst of anger. Wrath is God's perpetual opposition to sin because of His infinite holiness. I compare God's wrath to a kidney transplant. If I receive a kidney from a donor, my body will reject the kidney. The kidney is foreign to me. My immune system detects that the kidney does not belong to me and begins to destroy the organ. We now have drugs to suppress the immune system, so the foreign kidney is not destroyed. In like manner, sin is foreign to God. His infinite holiness perpetually rejects sin. The sacrificial death of Christ Jesus on the cross satisfied the justice of God. In Christ Jesus, God no longer deals with us in wrath but in grace. Such hope is never found in human merit. Such hope is found in the grace of God received through faith in Christ Jesus.

So the bad news is we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin and therefore children of wrath. Now on to the good news. But God who is rich in love stepped into our hopeless and helpless state and offered a cure.

## II. The Good News

*Mercy and Grace (2:4, 5):* When God's love is related to repentant sinners it becomes **MERCY and GRACE.**

**Mercy:** Is *to withhold what we deserve*. Despite any good work we may do, we still deserve wrath. In His mercy God restrains His judgement. A child may deserve a spanking. But as an act of mercy, the father withholds discipline. Because of God's mercy we are rescued from the wrath we deserve.

**Grace:** Is *to receive what we don't deserve*. In the story of the prodigal son, the son said to his father, "*I do not deserve to be called a son*" but the father treated him as a son nonetheless. That is a picture of grace (Luke 15:21). By God's grace through our faith in Christ Jesus, God imputes (credits) righteousness to unworthy and underserving sinners like you and me. In grace we receive the status of righteous before God even though we don't deserve that status.

Grace and mercy come together in the justification of a sinner. ***Grace credits us with a righteous standing before God and mercy acquits us from judgment for sin.*** Judgment is removed (mercy) and righteousness is granted (grace). In John 3:16 we see the work of mercy and grace in those who believe (*should not perish* (mercy) *but have eternal life* (grace)).

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that makes us alive unto God.

***Resurrected and Seated with Christ (2:6 – 9):*** We are made alive unto God by His ***grace through our faith***. Grace though faith is like water and a hose. The hose hooks onto a waterspout and water flows through the hose to quench our thirst. Faith joins us to the Lord Jesus and His life flows through our faith to quench our thirsty souls. At that point what is true of Christ Jesus is also true of us. We have been raised up with Christ; we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. His history becomes our history. We are not invited to sit in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus, we are already there. God's way of salvation in Christ Jesus is not work, and work some more – salvation is based on receiving the grace He has made available to all of us.

***God's Workmanship (2:10):*** As Christians, we make progress in our walk with the Lord Jesus by sitting with Him – by resting in His grace. During creation week, God was busy for the first six days and then He rested on the seventh day. Adam was created on the sixth day. He had no part in creation. When he arrived on the scene creation was complete. He was to enjoy the awesome world God had made. God's seventh day was Adam's first day. *Adam began his new life in God's rest*. When Adam was created, he was endowed with the capacity to do the work God had prepared for him as a steward of creation. In the same way, we are re-created by God through faith in Christ to do all the good works He has prepared in advance for us to do. We do not do good works to be saved we do good works because we are saved.

We make progress in our Christian Walk by resting in the salvation the Lord Jesus has realized for us.