
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

“But God...” (Part 2)

A Divine Intimacy

Ephesians 2:4-7

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 transgressions, 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 ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

As I am sure it has been for many of you, this has been an interesting week. In light of the events of the Supreme Court ruling last Friday, whether it was because I am a known Christian, or because I'm a known pastor, I've been asked a number of times if now I will do same-sex marriages. Of course my initial response was an immediate and emphatic, "No!" Such a question was generally followed up with the inevitable "why" question, which of course afforded me an opportunity to point people to Scripture. But some additional questions that have repeatedly come up after those initial questions has been these, "Do you think homosexuality is a sin and do you think homosexuals are going to hell?"

We actually addressed these types of questions at our last Thursday night home Bible Fellowship (by the way, I remind all of you that you are invited and greatly encouraged to come to our fellowship). But this question of "is homosexuality a sin?" and "do I think homosexuals are going to hell?" are questions that are framed inappropriately. Indeed, the Bible does identify homosexuality, along with a whole host of other attitudes and actions, as sin (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). So, if such questions were being asked in a court of law and I was on the opposing counsel, I would object saying that such questions are leading the witness. When you get asked these kinds of questions it is designed to set you up as being perceived as unloving, irrational, and bigoted.

You see, the issue is not is there any one particular sin that sends people to hell, rather the issue is this, "What kind of people are going to hell?" And the answer to that question is in fact answered in the text that we have been considering any Ephesians chapter 2. In Ephesians 2:1 we read these words, "**and you were dead in your trespasses and sins...**" I would have you notice there the divine dilemma each and every person has if they are not believers in Christ. That dilemma is that they are found in a condition - they are "**dead in their trespasses and sins.**" What this means is that a person is not dead because of any one particular sin; rather they are dead because they are found in a sinful state, a sinful condition.

And here my friends is the issue; it is the deceitfulness of sin is that it leads people to think that because of one sin or one particular kind of sin a person is eternally condemned before God. Often the thinking of those in the church is this, "If I could just avoid this one area of sin;" or "If we could just keep our culture from just these particular sins, then we would be blessed of the Lord." Our culture thinks, "If we can just redefine what the bible says is wrong to make it be right; if we can change what has been regarded "abnormal" and make it "normal", then all will be well with the world. And now we have a couple of problems. For the church we run into the problem of demanding of people to do something that this text actually says we all are incapable of because we are dead. Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds us that not only are people "dead" but that this condition of spiritual deadness is exasperated by the fact that we are also deluded by this world, deceived by the prince of the power of the air, that is Satan himself; that we find ourselves in a state of disobedience and that all of this leads us to the inevitable doom of judgment under the wrath of God.

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So then, how do we answer the question, "Does a person go to hell because he is a homosexual?" It would be just as fair to ask, "Does a person go to hell because he is a liar? Or because a person is lustful? Or because a person is a murderer?" What is the answer to such questions? Fundamentally the answer is a resounding, "No!" A person will be condemned to hell because he or she is a "sinner." And the last time that I checked; the overwhelming evidence of experience tells me that every person stands condemned not because of any one sin but because sin permeates his entire being. How many of you in this room have ever told a lie? Every single one of you have total lie, including myself. If I did not know Christ, would I be going to hell because I told a lie? That's just one of many ways in which sin has affected us. If I were to ask you to give me an accounting of every sin, we would find nothing short of Pandora's box, opening up sin upon sin upon sin for which we could be rightly condemned. You see, this is our condition before faith in Christ as evidenced any Ephesians 2:1-3.

This beloved is the scandal of sin; this is the scope of sin; this is the absolute horror of sin. And what does Romans 3:23 say, **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** This is our condition, this is our standing, this is our status before God; we are dead, deluded, depraved, disobedient, and doomed sinners. If this were the end of the story, there would be no hope, there would be no joy, and there would be no happy anticipation of heaven. But praise God the Scriptures do not and with the Ephesians 2:3.

As we noted a couple of weeks back, while we find ourselves in this divine dilemma of having nothing but the expectation of doom because of our spiritually dead condition apart from Christ, verse 4 introduces for us the greatest invasion history has ever known; the divine invasion of God into the deadness of the sinner. In verse 4 we read these words, **"But God..."** Here we are reminded that God has actually butted into our lines. And are you grateful that He did? In a great outpouring of what our text describes as rich mercy, and great love, even while we were in this dead, deluded, depraved, disobedient, and doomed condition, God invaded, God intervened, God inserted Himself into our lives.

So then, thus far in Ephesians 2, we have seen the divine dilemma of our deadness in sin followed by this divine invasion by which God, in spite of this godless condition in which we found ourselves, intervened and butted into our lives. This is the summation of what we studied thus far and it brings us to our next consideration. And ultimately the consideration could be stated like this; *that the purpose of God's divine invasion into our lives is to establish with us divine intimacy.* To state this another way, **genuine conversion to Christ always leads to great communion with Christ.** Why has God invaded our lives? Why did God but in to our lives? Did He do it to make a good person better; to make a bad person good? No, as we state so often, God invaded our lives in order to make those of us who were dead, alienated, and hostile in mind toward God now alive, intimate with, and engaged in righteousness with God. When God invades our hearts, God's goal is for us to have intimacy with Him. He wants us to know Him and to be known by Himself.

In a recent survey of a very large congregation in North America, the question was asked, "What do you fear the most?" Surprisingly, the primary answer from the pew was startling: *"intimacy with God."* The idea that we could be so known by God and so know Him scares many. It's possible that many genuine Christians might give this same response. Why is this? Let me pose another question: What would happen if God came to Benton County? What if He came to your front door? What if God sat down next to you and began asking you questions? How would you feel? What would you do? What would you *not* do? When God visits, people's priorities are quickly laid bare. We would quickly learn that familiarity and intimacy are not the same thing. I do not desire, for myself, or for anyone of you, simply familiarity with God but rather intimacy with God.

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Familiarity and intimacy are not the same. Each has a value in life; certainly we can see this in a marriage relationship. But one is no substitute for the other. If one is confused for the other, we have the basis for major human and marital unrest. In marriage, familiarity is inescapable. It happens almost imperceptibly – you pick up on the behaviors and habits of others. But intimacy, that deep understanding; that unbreakable bond of communion with another is generally harder to come by. Such closeness must be deliberately sought and opened up and responded to. Familiarity brings a degree of ease and comfort, while intimacy anxiously searches for deep understanding and personal appreciation. We must desire intimacy with God and as we will see in our text, beginning in verse 5, intimacy with God begins with God doing something for us, something that removes us from being alienated from God because of being dead in our sins and brings into intimacy with God.

A Divine Intimacy (5b-6)

[God] 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...

I. Intimacy with Christ by Regeneration (5b)

Not only has God invaded our lives and redeemed us by love, saving us from our dead and doomed position, but He brings us into an intimate relationship with Him by the most extraordinary of ways. Notice the last phrase of verse 5. They are significant. We read that God has, **“made us alive together with Christ...”** The idea of “made alive” literally means to “bring together with life.” We might say, “reanimation” or “regeneration.” That which was dead has now been brought together with life once again. Here we see the act of divine intimacy; for we were not simply “made alive” or brought back from death; but we were made alive “together,” that is, in relationship with, in the likeness of and in communion with Christ. Verse 5 began with dead and ends with this idea of life or conversion (our being made alive) and this leads to our communion. And what is communion? It literally means that we now have a something in common with Christ. We have a common union with Jesus.

Have you ever thought of it like this? What could we possibly have in common with Jesus? Well, based upon all that we read in chapter one; that salvation is a God thing through and through, seeing the work of God the Father in divine election; predestination; adoption as sons; and grace; having seen the work of the Son in our salvation in divine redemption and the forgiveness of sin; having seen the work of the Spirit in His provision of our divine inheritance and of our divine sealing; we need to be in awe that God has drawn us to Himself.

This idea that we have been adopted as sons and daughters of God – there lies our communion with Christ. In other words, when God looks upon us as His redeemed ones, He does not see us like we were (not just a liar, or a thief, or a drunkard, or a homosexual) because Ephesians 2:1 says God sees us simply as dead, destitute, depraved and doomed. Rather God looks upon us and sees us just as we are **“in Christ.”** If we are now **“in Christ”**, then God does not see our “sins” or our unrighteous condition of spiritual deadness, rather He sees the righteousness of His Son. God does not look upon us as we are in this flesh – fallen and dead sinners, but rather He sees us just as Jesus is – righteous. We have the righteousness of God in common with Christ.

To be sure, it is an alien righteousness. It is not our own or even of our own making. It has been given to us by God the Father, by our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. But, nonetheless, we now have righteousness, perfection, fitness to dwell in the presence of God all because God **“made us alive together with Christ.”** So then, when God invaded our hell-bent march toward eternal damnation, we must remember that He did so only by **“grace”**, How does verse 5 end? **“...for by grace you have been**

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saved.” All of grace and only by grace. It is by the unearned, unmerited favor of God; God intervened into our lives and change our relationship with and by Jesus. And what of this relationship? Being made alive in Christ gives us intimacy, communion, oneness with God. Before Christ, in our sinful condition, (again, note that it is not because of any one sin but because of the overwhelming cumulative devastation of the sinful condition), we were separated from Christ and God. The LORD God said it this way some 700 years before Christ came to the earth through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 59:2, **“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.”** Separated from God. We had nothing in common with the Deity. Nothing to tie us to God. Nothing to cause Him to desire us apart from His rich mercy, His great love, and His grand compassion. But now, by grace, we are brought into an intimate relationship with Him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul instructed the Corinthians in this matter this way saying, **“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”** Because of Adam's sin, because we are all descendants of him, we are all born “in Adam.” We need not commit a particular sin; we were already born spiritually dead. But for those who are born again; for those who come to Christ by faith believing that He personally died for their sinful condition on that cross; that Christ literally rose from the dead three days later; that Christ has ascended into Heaven from where He sent His Holy Spirit to empower us to live a life we could not otherwise live; these are, look what it says there in verse 22, **“in Christ all will made alive.”** God places us **“in Christ”** - in the realm, the sphere of Christ and by this divine “butting in” we are made the opposite of what we were before. We are forever changed. The words, **“But God...”** set up a contrast between what we have become **“in Christ”** with what we were before we met Christ – which was dead. Ephesians 2:5 reminds us again of this very thing; that while we were dead to God, God has what, **“made us alive together with Christ...”**

Look carefully at this as in verses 5, 6, and 7, Paul painstakingly wants his readers to realize this; that by God's doing we are, according to verse 5, **“with Christ”** [or, by reason of the work of Christ]; in verse 6, we are **“in Christ”** [found in the realm of Christ]; and, in verse 7, this is all **“through”** or “by Christ” [as a result of the work of Christ].

Let me tell you something I hope causes you to ponder the wonder of God. Because we are in Jesus Christ, we now have intimacy; such a commonality with Christ that we are now identified with Him. What do I mean by this? Listen, in the eyes, justice and economy of God, what is true of Jesus Christ - - - is true of all those who are in Christ. Where He is, they are (**“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** – Matthew 28:20). What He is, they are (**“and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God”** - Ephesians 3:19). I have no other words but that of the Psalmist, David when he said, **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it”** (Psalm 139:6). This is intimacy with Christ by regeneration, but there is more...

II. Intimacy with Christ by Resurrection (6a)

...and raised us up with Him

In verse 5 we learned that God transforms a dead person by making him “alive!” In verse 6 we learn that being made alive, means being raised up to a new life just like Jesus. You see, when God saves the sinner He does so by bringing him out of spiritual death and then He imparts to him the very resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. That formerly old and dead person becomes a **“new creature”** in Christ according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. That formerly dead sinner is instantaneously **“born again”** according to John 3:3. Such a sinner is delivered from spiritual death, spiritual delusion,

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spiritual depravity and spiritual doom. He is given life and he is given it abundantly, to the full, according to our Lord Jesus as recorded in John 10:10).

The point is this; once a sinner is saved, once he is **"made alive together with Christ,"** he then begins living a new life. His actions and attitudes are new as he is awakened by and to the things of God (see Romans 6:4). For the one now **"in Christ"** is no longer dead to God, or to His Word, or to His worship and will. He is dead to sin but alive to God. Things that never used to move his mind now thrill his soul. Does this describe you? Because if it does not, then you are not saved; you are still dead in your sins.

Beloved, when God invades and enters into our lives; He comes to live in us and we are to live in Him. In this new life, it is the aim of God, and it is to become our aim, to live a life that becomes increasingly "indistinguishable" from the life that Jesus lived. Is this true? Is the believer's goal to see his or her own life become more and more indistinguishable from that of Jesus? What does the Scripture say? In Galatians 2:20 we read, **"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."** His will, His desires become my own. This is how intimate I am with Jesus, that because I share in His life, tomorrow does not have to be like yesterday. Through my connection with Jesus Christ, I have not just been given any old life; I have been given the very life of Jesus inside me! I have been empowered to live a new life, as a **"new creature"** to the glory of God!

Now, typically, when we hear the word **"resurrection"**, we tend to think only of something that will happen in the future. To be sure, a day is coming when the physically dead will rise, but it is a more profound truth that for those "in Christ" a resurrection has already taking place! According to Jesus in John 5:24, those who believe on Him have already, **"passed out of death and into life..."** If you are saved, then you have already met Him who is called, **"the Resurrection and the Life"** and you have already been raised from the dead, having been called out of the darkness of the tomb of spiritual death to live a new life for the glory of God (see John 11:25-26). In John 11:44 Jesus said something about Lazarus that is true spiritually for all whom He has called to life. Jesus said of Lazarus, **"Unbind him, and let him go!"** Jesus set him free from the grave clothes of sin. This beloved was a physical picture of what Jesus does for each one of His redeemed. When God sees His redeemed ones, He sees a resurrected people! In a real sense, when Jesus rose from the grave some 2,000 years ago, all the redeemed walked out of that tomb with Him! We share in the intimacy of His resurrection. And let us remember that His resurrection lead Jesus to His ascension; His return to the glories of heaven. What a picture! Just as Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God the Father; so too are those who have believed on Him. When Jesus ascended from the top of the Mount of Olives, all the redeemed ascended into Heaven with Him! I cannot explain it, but in the mind of God it happened! It is a done deal! But there is one more glorious truth to consider...

III. Intimacy with Christ by Realm (6b)

...and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

Beloved, when Jesus left this earth and ascended back into Heaven, He then sat down on the right hand of God. And according to this verse, when Jesus went up, we went up with Him. And when Jesus sat down in the glorious presence of the Father, we sat down with Him!

But how can this be since we are still obviously in the world in this very moment. Our GPS coordinates are on this earth. What a reminder we have here that God sees the end from the beginning and so we are being taught here that God looks at us in terms of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Let me say it again, where Jesus is, we are. What He has experienced, we have

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experienced. When He died on the cross, we are said to have died. When He arose from the dead, we are said to have arisen with Him. When He ascended into heaven, we are said to have ascended with Him. When He sat down on the right hand of God, we are said to have been seated with Him. And when He comes for us, we will still be found in Him.

Mind-boggling? Yes! These are difficult concepts for us to get our heads wrapped around. But we must remember that we serve a God who resides outside the confines of time and space. Our God sees all of things, indeed all of time all at the same time. He sees us where we are now, and He sees us where He has determined we will be when this life ends. God sees us as we live in this world, but we are regarded to be in such an intimate relationship with Jesus that when God sees Him, He sees us as completed in Him.

If these things be so; then it must be true that those who believe in Christ are dead to sin because Christ dies for our sin. It must be true that we are live to God and to righteousness because the power of His resurrection life has been given to us (Philippians 3:10). It must be true that we are exalted with Him because we have been, in the words of Colossians 1:13, transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. In other words, we have already been elevated into Heaven because God sees us as if we were already there!

Beloved, this is why we can know and teach the Biblical doctrine of eternal security. Look back with me at the end of verse 5. We read, *by grace you have been saved*. Paul does something unique and extraordinary here when he wrote this. Literally this reads, "by grace you are, have been saved" – very awkward to read but important for us to grasp. By using the present tense of the verb "to be" translated here as "you are" – we are to understand that this God initiated salvation is still a present reality. Believers are, right now, being saved by God and will continue to be saved by God. But after the "to be" verb, Paul uses the "have been saved" verb in what is called the perfect tense. The perfect tense speaks of something that has happened in the past, it going on in the present and will continue on in the future. In other words, the perfect tense includes the present tense idea; but includes the past and the future. We have been saved in the past; it is dramatically taking place in the present and it will continue on in the future. Those who are saved today will be saved tomorrow and they will continue to be saved by God. The idea here is that as far as God is concerned, in Christ, we have been and already are in Heaven. All that is left is to finish the trip.

That God sees it like this is revealed in the fact that all the other verbs in our text are in the past tense, describing the intimacy we already have with Him. Notice in verse 5 the past tense, *"made us alive"*; in verse 6, *"has raised us up"*; and *"seated us together with Him..."* These are all spoken of as being in past. Why? Because in the mind of God they have already taken place! We are as good for Heaven as if we were already there!

This is our new condition with God, one of intimacy with and because of Jesus Christ. We have such a commonality with Jesus Christ that all the things that have happened to Him are said to have happened to us.

So what is the point? Beloved, if we have been raised with Christ, ascended with Christ, and seated with Christ; then we are rightly reminded by Philippians 3:20 that we are citizens of Heaven now and that we ought to live like it. Look back with me at Ephesians 1:3 which says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..."* Yes, we live in a fallen, sin-filled world; and yet we currently enjoy the blessings of that Heavenly world. Because of our intimate relationship with Jesus, these blessing are ours even today. To be sure, one day we will go home to be with the Lord and experience these blessing first hand. In the meantime, we are reminded that our present condition in Christ is no longer that of being

Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

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dead, deluded, depraved, disobedient and doomed. Rather we have been made alive together with Christ; raised up together with Christ; and seated together with Christ. The day will come when we arrive physically in heaven, fully enjoying and experiencing those present realities. And while we struggle to fully understand and experience these things are present realities, such cannot change the truth of such realities. We are in Christ and where He is, there we are! This is how intimate we are with Him.

Now I cannot make you believe these things but I can promise you this; if you do really believe these things, it will radically change the way you look at the events and experiences of this life. And where did all of this begin? Back in verse 4 with **"But God..."** and it culminates with the idea at the end of verse 5 that says, **"by grace you have been saved."** Some of you have heard it said that if you a turtle sitting on top of a fence post, you know that it didn't get there by itself. The same is true of everyone who believes and is now "in Christ." Not one us got here on our own. This text, this chapter, indeed all of Scripture teaches that salvation rests solely in the grace of God. We were dead and could not and did not want to get to Him. Yet God came to us! We did not love Him but rather were His enemies; yet He loved us. This is amazing love! This is amazing grace that stooped to reached down into the depths of our dead, deluded, depraved and doomed condition. This is the grace that saved us, changed us and brought us into intimacy, communion with Christ.

So then, just as people are not sent to hell by any one particular sin but because they are in the condition of sin; a condition that can manifest itself in countless ways, so too then are people not brought into heaven by any one singular act but rather by the cumulative righteousness of Christ as revealed in His person, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension and His promises.

Do you believe this about Christ? Will you remember this about Christ? Will you proclaim this about Christ?

Soli Deo Gloria

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