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Sermon Brief
Text: Eph. 2:1-10
Title: Then and Now
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

What is our spiritual condition in this world? Most people would be inclined to say, “I’m okay. Not perfect, but okay.” But God takes a very different view about us. And the bottom line of the issue is that what God says is what matters. Why? Because His verdict will determine our eternal destiny. And it determines the quality of life we experience in this world as well. Thus, it’s quite important to understand His assessment of our spiritual condition. That should become the basis of needed action on our part to better our situation for both now and the future.

The divine perspective on the human predicament is found in numerous texts scattered across the New Testament. One of the clearest expressions is the periodic BC / AD texts that surface in several letters of the New Testament. By BC / AD texts, I mean the passages that describe the human situation before Christ (BC) and then the change after Christ (AD).

The central point of these texts is that the coming of Christ into the individual’s life is the decisive difference. Only in Christian conversion through faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord over one’s life can the spiritual predicament move from negative to positive. Christ makes the difference! And only Christ. We can’t change our situation by our own effort. We’re hopelessly enslaved to sin and death. No one can change it for us, except God.

Today, I want us to take a look at one of these BC / AD texts. It’s found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians chapter two and verses one through ten.

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through 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 ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.¹

The Letter to the Ephesians was written as a “cover letter” for at least two other letters of Paul, Colossians² and Philemon both of which had Colossae as their ultimate destination. Ephesians was written in the late 50s while the apostle was imprisoned in Caesarea Philippi awaiting the outcome of his trial before the Roman governor of Palestine. These three documents make up three of the four letters called the Prison Letters of Paul. Philippians would be written by Paul from Rome after his arrival there a few years later. These three letters were carried to the western part of the Roman province of Asia by Tychius who delivered them to their destination. Ephesians was intended as a foundational writing to be read in many different churches of

¹GNT: 2.1 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 2.2 ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας· 2.3 ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί· 2.4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, 2.5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, - χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι - 2.6 καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 2.7 ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 2.8 τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· 2.9 οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. 2.10 αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

²The connection of Ephesians to Colossians is extensive. For example, of the 155 verses in Ephesians 73 have verbal parallels in Colossians. Only brief portions of Ephesians have no parallels in Colossians, i.e., 2:6-9, 4:4-13, 5:29-33 et al.

that region.³ Consequently the geographical designation “in Ephesus” in 1:1 was left blank in the earliest copies of the text of the letter. The reader would simply insert the appropriate designation each time the letter was read to a different congregation. Consequently, Ephesians covers broad, general themes basic to Christian experience and contains almost no specific references to individual situations in a particular church, unlike most all of Paul’s other letters. This gives to Ephesians a doctrinal tone with timeless truths being affirmed about the nature of Christianity.

Thus the BC / AD text of chapter two stands as an important insight into the human situation spiritually for all time. With Christ making the decisive difference between the BC and the AD conditions, what are these two predicaments? In simple summation the difference is clear. Before Christ we lived in spiritual death, but after Christ came into our lives we exist in spiritual life. That is true for every one of us here today. It is true for every human being living on planet earth. So the critical question is where are you in relation to Jesus Christ? If He has come into your life, you are spiritually alive. But if He hasn’t, then you are spiritually dead. It’s just that simple.

Now what about these two conditions? What are they and how do they differ from one another? Then and Now are important parts of our life. And Christ is the dividing point between them.

BODY

I. **Then: spiritual death, vv. 1-3**

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

2.1 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 2.2 ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργούντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας· 2.3 ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιούντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί·

Before we get into a detailed examination of Eph. 2:1-3, we can profit from a quick comparison of the matching part of Col. 1:21-23.

21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

1:21 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ποιηροῖς, 1:22 νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, 1:23 εἶ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἐδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.

In this very abbreviated BC/AD passage, only verse 21 treats the BC segment: “**And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,**” In Colossians a major emphasis is upon the inner situation of the person outside of Christ. It involved estrangement and hostility. This in turn led to evil actions flowing outward in the non-Christian’s life. To be sure, the language of Colossians at this point is largely influenced by the dominate theme of reconciliation in the main clause. These BC traits stand in antithesis to being in harmonious relationship with God.

In a somewhat similar fashion, the Eph. 2:1-3 BC segment stresses traits that stand in antithesis to the main clause of being made alive. The condition of spiritual death and spiritual enslavement control the depiction in Ephesians. One helpful insight from such a comparison is that Paul’s positive emphasis (the AD segment) will guide his description of the BC segment. Additionally, both the non-Christian and the conversion sides of religious experience are so profound that no single characterization fully covers the depths of both situations.

A couple of preliminary observations. The “you’all” and “we” contrast surfaces here. Verses one and two focus on the non-Jewish readers of this letter, while verse three picks up the “all us Jewish Christians” perspective. Secondly, in the single Greek sentence encompassing verses one through seven, the core foundational clause doesn’t surface until verse four and even then is interspersed with expansion elements: “**God...has**

³The scholarly label for this is “circular letter.”

made us alive together with Christ Jesus...” Verses one through three establish who it is that God has brought to life: both the spiritually dead Gentile and also the spiritually dead Jew.

What then is spiritual death? Verses one through three answer that question. Three essential points are made by Paul.

(1) In verse one we lived in spiritual death. Paul said we were dead, but we were alive before becoming Christians. What is he getting at? In the schema of 2:1-10, death precedes life, rather than the physical sequence of life followed by death. What is this death? Notice the rest of verse one in both the NRSV and the NLT translations. The NRSV says “**were dead through the trespasses and sins...**” But the NLT says “**were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins.**” The Today’s English Version is along the same lines with its rendering, “**In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins.**” The difference in these two patterns of expression play off the Greek expression. Although neither pattern is incorrect, the broader more Hebraic way of thinking probably in the back of Paul’s mind is that in the midst of our waywardness and sinfulness we were living in spiritual death, a death that was sealing our eternal fate in Hell unless the situation was somehow changed. Both English translation patterns attempt to build off this broader idea with correctly derived ideas: “**through...**”; “**because...**” But a deeper reality can be easily overlooked. Spiritual death exists in the cesspool of disobedience and sin. Death both feeds off wrong behavior and at the same time feeds it as well. As Paul continues to declare in the relative clause of verse two: “**in which you formerly lived out your life...**” The ‘which’ goes back to the reference to disobedience and sin at the end of verse one. The point being that the way we lived out our lives was in this cesspool. Our behavior, our attitudes, our relationships -- all this is covered by the word picture of “walking” -- were a reflection of and driven by the spiritual and moral cesspool that our life existed in. For those non-Jews in the first century the reference here could allude to patterns of behavior considered highly offensive even in today’s Hollywood.

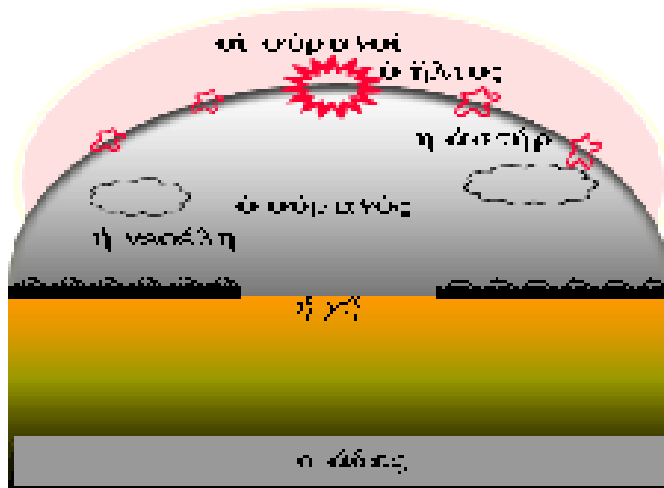
Romans 1:20-31 (NRSV) paints a rather grim picture of the dark side of that world: “**20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they [the godless Gentiles] are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.**” This is the moral cesspool of death.

(2) We live our lives under the control of evil powers. In verse two Paul asserted that these Gentile Christians prior to conversion “**used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air**” (NLT). The ‘course of this world’ is clo the Jones.” It underscores what all of us have heard our everybody’s doing it.” On the surface they were living lik the next phrase, standing in apposition to this phrase, de

It’s living under the control of Satan himself. Paul uses cosmological terms here to declare this. Satan is “the ruler of the power of the air.”

Let me borrow a graphic I created for my Greek grammar to illustrate. In the way ancient Jews -- and Christians -- viewed the world, as reflected in this illustration, the space between earth and the canopy at the top of the sky was the region controlled by Satan and served as his launch pad for attacks on people on the earth. Thus Paul’s phrase here, and several times elsewhere, reflects this perspective. The devil rules absolutely that space above the earth and below where God is -- above the canopy of the sky -- and from there controls the actions of those not shielded from his power by Christ. Although Gentiles assumed they were the masters of their own fate, in reality another far greater power was controlling it, Satan himself.

At the end of verse two Paul transitions over to the Jewish side while connecting in the Gentile aspect as well. **(3) Satan is also the spirit at work in the “sons of disobedience.”** This phrase is a play on the [Hebrew idiom](#) “son of Abraham.” But they’re not true sons of Abraham; instead, they’re the sons of disobedience, in



contrast to the faithful Abraham. In brilliant expression Paul declares that this same evil power working on the Gentiles from above the earth is also alive in the Jews as well leading them to disobey the God who provided their redemption through Christ Jesus.

In verse three Paul extends this “sons of disobedience” image with the declaration: “All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.” No Jew could look with contempt upon the sinfulness of the Gentiles, since their lives were just as consumed by fleshly and sensual passions. In a repetition of his play on the “son of Abraham” idiom, he then declares that “sons of disobedience” are also “children of wrath” just like the rest of the world. The meaning here is obvious: people doomed to face the awful wrath of God in eternal judgment.

Thus Paul moves from spiritual death lived out in a moral cesspool to eternal damnation from the wrath of God. The pattern of deviant behavior defined as rebellion, sin, and disobedience both feeds off this death and nourishes it.

But notice Paul’s verb tense here: “You formerly were”; “we all once behaved ourselves...” A dramatic change has taken place that moved both Gentile and Jew from this pitiful existence into something new and different.

This is our “then” situation, my friends. It’s not a pretty picture. But it is the spiritual reality asserted by God about your life and mine outside of Christ. Whether we realize it, whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not matters not. It’s fundamental reality established and controlled by God. It is where a person exists outside of Christ.

Does this describe where you are right now spiritually? If Christ is not controlling your life, then it certainly does, whether you realize it or not. You’re in a mess and your life is in danger, terrible danger. It’s empty and hallow, without serious purpose and direction, full of broken relationships and anger toward other people, just drifting aimlessly like a chunk of wood floating down the Rhine River. It’s out of control, and under the domination of passions and outside forces, even though you may think it isn’t.

You need Christ in your life desperately. He -- and He alone -- can change all this. What difference will He make? In verses four through ten, Paul sets forth some of the changes that come about with Christ coming into a person’s life.

II. **Now: spiritual life, vv. 4-10**

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through 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 ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life

2.4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, 2.5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασι συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, - χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι - 2.6 καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 2.7 ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰώσι τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 2.8 τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· 2.9 οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσθαι. 2.10 αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

Again a comparison of Eph. 2:4-10 to Col. 1:22-23 provides helpful insights. Obviously the much shorter Colossians passage summarizes the AD segment of Christian experience much more briefly, but still gives us some important perspectives: “you...he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.” The core emphasis here is reconciliation to God by Christ in his death for us. Behind this imagery is the reality that as sinners we stand in alienation to a holy and righteous God. Nothing that we could do for ourselves could possibly overcome this estrangement. But Christ in taking upon himself our sinfulness has provided the way to reconciliation and peace with God. The objective is to present us holy and blameless before God in final judgement. The condition for realizing that objective is our faithfulness to commitment to Christ within the framework of the apostolic Gospel that Paul had committed his life to preaching. Anything less than that spells spiritual disaster. In Colossians Paul uses one of the great themes of Christian conversion to make his point, while in Ephesians another powerful theme is utilized to make a very similar point about Christian conversion.

The foundational thought of these verses in Eph. 2:4-10 is the core expression mentioned earlier: “But

God...has made us alive together with Christ Jesus..." This is then extended by grammatical compound declarations: "and raised us up with him and seated us with him."

Some observations here.

First, the God who did this is "rich in mercy," and did these things "out of the great love with which he loved us" (v. 4; NRSV). No cruel Greek Zeus could have or would have reached down to pitiful humanity with such spectacular actions. God's grace is the instrument of our salvation, not our merit or achievements. God's [mercy](#) is a major theme of the Bible. For greater details see Philip Towner's online article on mercy in [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#). Here is one brief excerpt from that article:

Beyond viewing salvation as God's great act of mercy, the profound effect on the early church that God's mercy had can be seen in several other ways. Paul was conscious that his own rescue from a life as the church's and God's enemy came about because of God's mercy (1 Tim 1:13,16). His behavior deserved judgment, but God in his mercy bestowed salvation instead. Paul also regarded the right to participate in ministry as a decision of God grounded on his mercy (2 Cor 4:1). He saw with great sensitivity that even seemingly mundane events were actually manifestations of God's helping mercy (Php 2:27). It is this kind of imprint on the heart that made mercy a common wish and blessing of one believer to another (2 Tim 1:16,18), and in some cases the opening greetings of letters included the wish for mercy (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 2; cf. Gal 6:16). In view of these examples, it is not exaggerating to say that life in Christ gives birth in believers' hearts to a consciousness not only of being recipients of God's mercy in one gift of salvation, but also of being daily recipients of fresh "mercies" of God, emblems of his ownership of us and care for us (Rom 12:1; 2 Cor 1:3; all of the greetings cf. Lam 3:22-23).

In this awareness of God's past, present, and future (Jude 21) mercy toward us, an element of our response to God takes on a new force in the New Testament. Christians are to be channels of God's mercy in the church and in the world.

The awareness in Judaism and early Christianity of the responsibility to show mercy is evident in the practice of almsgiving (eleemosyne [ἐλεημοσύνη]), a term developed from eleos [ἔλεος]. This expression of mercy in the form of charitable giving might be driven by wrong motives (Matt 6:2-4), but in Luke's writings especially it is cited as an example of true spirituality. Thus in Luke 11:41 the value of giving alms is placed high above religious rules about purity, which the Pharisees guarded so carefully. In 12:33 mercy expressed in charitable giving is made a characteristic of discipleship. This specific way of showing mercy is praised in the early church (Acts 9:36; 10:2) and clearly regarded as an aspect of the normal Christian life (cf. Acts 24:17). In this way Christians become living signs of God's perfect mercy introduced in Christ and one day to be fully realized (cf. Acts 3:3, 6).

One clear implication of believers as the recipients of God's mercy is the requirement of them then showing that mercy to others.

The other trait of God stressed as the basis of God's saving action is His love: "because of His great love with which He loved us" (διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς,). [God's love](#) demonstrated on Calvary stands as a basic foundation of our salvation. This is Paul's point here. God's love us enough so that while we were sinners He allowed His son to die a horrible death on Calvary so we could be saved.

Second, what did he do? Paul's umbrella term here is "saved us" (v. 7). Rescue from disaster is at the heart of the issue. We who were children of wrath, doomed to eternal damnation, now have been saved from such a fate, both Jew and Gentile believers. How did God do that? Paul's answer here: God made us alive, raised us up, and seated us. Within the framework of the ancient Jewish perspective this means that God took sinful humanity on earth living in spiritual death, headed for doom at physical death into the underworld of Sheol or Hades and made that humanity alive. The process and fate of death was reversed and deliverance brought about. This entailed a spiritual resurrection, a raising up that ended in being seated in the Heavenly places above the canopy of the limits of the sky where Satan rules supremely. We are seated in the throne room of Heaven where God controls everything. Spiritually we now live with God. Thus we have a dual existence. Our earthly existence still continues on, but our real existence is already with God in Heaven. Later Paul will speak of the mystery of our faith. This is a part of what he is alluding to. But here this is what Paul meant by his term 'saved us.'

The marvelous aspect of all this experience is that it is "with Christ Jesus." Just as Jesus went from the death of Calvary to resurrection life on Easter Sunday and then to ascension to Heaven forty days later, we who are connected to Christ by faith share in that very same experience personally with Christ. We in the moment of our faith commitment moved from death to being made alive then to being raised up and then to being seated in Heaven with God next to Christ at the banquet table of the Almighty. Notice the verb tenses for all three core verbs: "made us alive, raised us up, seated us..." These actions are linked to Jesus' experience, and through faith commitment become our experience now. This is a part of the mystery. That is, something that can't be clearly explained to an outsider. Rather, it must be experienced in order for its reality to be grasped.

Paul in Gal. 2 describes the same thing with slightly different words (NRSV): "19 For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God's approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. 20 I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." His cosmology here is to focus on the continued physical life on

the earth, and that Christ through the indwelling Spirit lives inside Paul during the days on earth guiding Paul. Although the focus is different, the core spiritual reality is the same in both passages. Whether one stresses existence in Heaven or on earth as a believer, Christ is present with us because of his death and resurrection.

Third, verse seven points toward purpose. Why did God do this for both sinful Jew and Gentile? *“So that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”* God’s motivation was to demonstrate his love for all the world and by his gracious deliverance of us who believe the rest of the world can be convinced of that divine love. Our salvation has a deeper objective that reaches beyond us. We who are so blessed by God are witnesses and evidence to an unbelieving world of that love and power to deliver.

Verses eight through ten begin to tie up the final strings. Verse eight repeats the interruption in verse five -- by grace you are saved -- with the additional qualifier *“by faith.”* Our English language doesn’t have the ability to clearly distinguish the conceptualization in the Greek text. In the English *“you are saved”* is qualified two ways: (1) by grace and (2) through faith. In very clear Greek expression Paul declared God’s grace is the direct means of salvation. Our faith response is the channel through which that saving grace flows into our lives. Our faith doesn’t become an agent of salvation. Paul is adamant here. Such a rescue as described above is exclusively the powerful work of God alone.

In the second part of verse eight Paul makes this abundantly clear with his expression: *“and this not from yourself, rather God’s gift.”* Verse nine then adds the Pauline denial of his old Pharisaical perspective that one’s own Torah obedience could effect salvation. His Damascus Road experience had forever convinced him that no one could ever possibly lift himself up to God acceptably by his own boot straps. This promoted spiritual boasting and arrogance. The divine grace through Christ eliminated any possibility of us bragging about how good we’ve become.

Verse ten comes back to summarize the essence of the passage. We -- both Jew and Gentile Christian -- stand as the product of God’s craftsmanship. He created us *“in Christ Jesus.”* We are the recipients of this divine grace, not the achievers of it.

Now Paul brings us down from sitting around God’s banquet table in Heaven back to our earthly life from the point of being made alive. What are these remaining days for, before rejoining Jesus in Heaven permanently? What is our purpose? Paul’s answer: to live out our lives doing the good works that God has prescribed for us. Although not immediately clear in the English expression, the Greek signals a connection between this purpose statement in verse ten and the previous one in verse seven. The link is this. How does it become evident to an unbelieving world that God has produced such an amazing expression of saving grace in our lives? How can they see this grace of God at work? Prior to experiencing the profound rescue of God personally, they have absolutely no way to understand or grasp the spiritual reality that has taken place in our lives. *Put simply, how can they see God at work in us? Verse ten answers that question: by the good deeds they see us doing, that is, by the dramatic change in our behavior and life-style after becoming a Christian.*

If no change in our behavior takes place, there’s no way a darkened world can see God’s grace. That’s a huge responsibility God has placed on our shoulders.

CONCLUSION

Now summing up. What has happened to us in conversion? Verses one through ten sum things up well. Our rotten sinful lives have been rescued from God’s wrath in eternal doom. We have been made alive spiritually and are seated at God’s banquet table. But there’s empty chairs at that table. Others need to be seated as well. Although we sit at God’s table we also continue to live on planet earth. In that aspect of our living we stand as God’s craftsmanship, his product. As the others see us as the achievement of God’s grace through the transformation of our living from sinful actions to good deeds, they can realize the power of God’s grace to change them as well, so they can also be seated at God’s table. That’s our purpose in these remaining days before rejoining Jesus permanently and fully at God’s table in Heaven.

When we begin realizing who we are spiritually, the rest falls into place. It’s a wonderful day to realize that every one of us who are believers have stamped across our life: *“Made in Heaven by God himself.”* Hopefully the world around us won’t have to look hard to see that label. The challenge is to always show the world the *“After”* side of us, and never the *“Before”* side.

Wow! There’s a huge difference between ‘Then’ and ‘Now’ in the believer’s life. The difference between spiritual death and spiritual life. And Christ has made this difference.

Is Christ in your life today? I plead with you my friend, accept Him right now as Savior and Lord. Confess Him publicly as Lord and Savior. Follow Him into believer’s baptism. Let Him change your life! He stands ready and willing, if you will but let Him today.