

ALIVE IN CHRIST
By Terry Jones, April 13, 2008
Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

Ephesians 2:1-10

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Though we were dead because of our sins God offers His grace and mercy to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

INTRO. - My wife and I had finished eating at one of the local restaurants waiting for our check. We did not get the bill. Our waitress informed us that a couple had paid for the meal. What a wonderful deed! That is grace. One of our members came by our house last week to trim our shrubs and flowers. He would not accept any money. He enjoys doing this work for us. That is grace, undeserved favor. We did not deserve these gifts.

My wife and I visited our children last week in Kentucky. Our son and his wife treated us to lunch at a local pizza shop. Our son paid for our meal. That is grace. That is also amazing! We receive gifts we do not deserve. How do we respond to these undeserved gifts? We accept them with gratitude.

In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul expresses his gratitude to God for His goodness. "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 Jesus." Paul repeats a theme in this chapter, "To the praise of His glory." He also writes, "I pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His toward us who believe." Paul credits all these great promises because Jesus died and God raised Him from the dead. Now Jesus has all dominion and power over His church.

Within the context of praises to God, Paul launches into the subject of the grace of God. This grace passage is addressed to all of us who fear we may not be saved. He speaks to all of us who believe we will get to Heaven by a few good deeds. This Scripture clarifies the confusion about being saved by grace and not by works. I speak to you who are tired of trying to be good enough to please God. This passage meets our greatest need, our salvation that promises Heaven for eternal home.

I. BELIEVE GOD'S APPRAISAL OF OUR SIN, Vv. 1-3

- A. Illus. - I was lost once while boating with a group of the church staff on Nolin Lake in central Kentucky. Since none of us had been boating on this lake before we spent about an hour touring the lake. What a joy to experience God's creation! We decided to return to the cottage we were using but we could not find this cottage. No problem! We had a map. We had a problem. We did not know where we were. We drove for some time until we found a marina. We had another problem. Who would ask for directions? Real men do not ask directions. Finally one man agreed to get directions. The worker showed him where we were and how to get to the cottage, not very far from the marina. We were no longer lost. Life is similar to navigating an unknown area. We may be lost but a map is no good if we do not know where we are. Concerning salvation we need to know first where we are before we can find our way to God.
- B. Scriptures teach we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins.
1. We lived in the way of the world.
 - a. Ex. - When someone dies we need an official pronouncement of the death. A doctor, hospice nurse, or a coroner, or some other qualified person must declare the person has died. The Bible is our official announcement we are spiritually dead in our sins.
 - b. We lived in the course or the persuasion of the world.
 - 1). The world is against God.
 - 2). Following the world causes spiritual death.
 - c. Illus. - When your car stops, you need a mechanic to make it run again. The mechanic will diagnose the problem. After the diagnosis your car is repaired. What is God's diagnosis of our problem? God says we died spiritually when we sinned against God. What is the cause of our trespasses and sins?
 2. We lived under the power of the devil.
 - a. The devil is the cause of all sin.
 - b. We cannot escape His influence and power.
 - c. The devil rebelled against God but God placed him under eternal condemnation and now the devil has nothing to lose causing people to hurt God.
 - d. We can blame ignorance, poverty, disease, or a multitude of problems in our world for our troubles.
 - e. Romans 6:23 - The wages of sin is death.
- C. The Bible teaches us our disobedience causes double-trouble.

1. First, sin makes our souls sick.
 - a. We lived in the lusts of our flesh, selfish desires, through the influence of the devil.
 - b. Just as contaminated water or food would make us sick, our lusts makes us spiritually sick before God.
2. Second, sin makes us guilty before God.
 - a. We lived as children of wrath.
 - b. We not only perform sinful actions but we possess a corrupted nature.
 - c. Therefore, we are guilty before God who places us under His wrath.
 - d. Ex. - Cathy Lynn Grossman, asked in USA Today, "Has the 'notion of sin' been lost? She answers her own question, "No, not by a long shot." She cites Ellison Research in Phoenix who finds 87% of U.S. adults believe in the existence of sin. Adultery topped the list (81%) and racism was second (74%). On other sins, the public depended on how people viewed their sin. However, we prefer the Bible over public opinion.

D. Illus. - The great preacher, D. Martin Lloyd Jones, tells a story about an atheistic professor named Joad. Before World War Two he did not believe in God but the war made him a believer. He said the Bible was right about a principle of evil being at work. He said he could not explain the war in any other way. The war was not an accident but a devilish evil power at work. From the Bible's description of the work of the devil he believed the Bible to be true. If the Bible is true about evil, the Bible is true about salvation from God's judgment on evil.

E. But God rich in mercy will raise us up from our spiritual death.

II. HEAR THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S LOVE, Vv. 4-7

- A. But God is rich in mercy.
1. God loved us when we were dead in sin.
 - a. We lived in sin, a collection of little sins or blatant and public rebellion against God.
 - b. Illus. - I do some of the cleaning at our house. Real men help their wives! After I run the vacuum cleaner I am amazed of the amount of dirt in the carpet. How dirty would a house get if it went 20, 30, or 40 years without cleaning? For this reason we

must pray daily, "Search me O God and know my heart and see if there is some wicked way in me and cleanse me."

c. God loves us when we stink in spiritual death.

2. God saved us by His grace.

a. Grace means a gift.

b. God requires the penalty of suffering to pay for our sins that offend His holy nature.

c. Jesus paid God's penalty for us when He suffered and died on the cross.

d. All that Jesus did for us is called grace, acronym for grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense

e. We are saved by the gift of God's grace.

B. God raised us up from our sins to be seated with Christ.

1. God wants to display the riches of His grace.

a. All of us have a testimony for Christ.

b. Ex. - Paul persecuted Christians for believing Jesus was the Messiah. He led the persecution that put people into prison, confiscated their property, and had them beaten and stoned. God forgave Paul for his evil deeds. As a result, Paul was a witness of the riches of God's grace. God wants to use our story of conversion to display His grace.

2. God raised us from the depths of sin to the heights of His mercy.

a. God lifts us up to a new height of living.

b. Applic. - Sin is short-term fun but it always hurts us in the long-term. God lifts us from our addictions to alcohol, drugs, porn, sex, and selfishness. Faith in God raises us from idolatry, greed, and unhealthy fears.

C. Sin gives us double-trouble of a sick soul and guilt before God but Christ's grace saves us.

III. ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE TO BE SAVED, V. 8-9

A. Ex. - The old hymn, Rock of Ages, is hardly anyone's favorite Christian song. One line expresses a great theme of God's grace. "Be of sin the double-cure, save from wrath and make me pure."

B. By grace you are saved.

1. God is the source of our salvation.

2. I once thought if we did all the good deeds we could do to be saved then God made up the difference we needed but I was wrong.
 3. Jesus is the sole source of our salvation.
 4. Grace is a gift we accept or refuse.
- B. Through faith you are saved.
1. Acceptance of a gift is not earning the gift.
 2. We accept grace through faith.
 3. Faith is a general description of all we do to accept salvation.
 - a. Ex. - Acts 16, Paul and Silas have been beaten and put in jail for casting a demon out of young woman. At midnight they sang praises to God. God sent an earthquake which released all the prisoners. The jailer drew out his sword to kill himself because the Romans killed the jailer if the prisoners escaped. Paul cried out, "Do yourself no harm!" The jailer came trembling and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved." Paul instructed the jailer and his family that night until they were baptized. Baptism comes after belief in Jesus Christ. The jailer was saved by grace. Can you be saved without grace? No. Can you be saved without faith? No. Can you be saved without baptism? No. They are all connected.
 - b. Ex. - In Acts 2, Peter preached for the first time publicly that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The listeners cried out in anguish, "What shall we do?" Peter knew they believed what he had said so he instructed them, "Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit." Peter placed repentance under faith. Does baptism cause salvation? No. Baptism is the time when God declares the repenting believer is saved.
 4. Illus. - Imagine you win \$100,000. The only requirements are to identify yourself and accept the gift. Would the proof of identity and receiving the money earn you the \$100,000? You have only accepted the gift. With belief in Jesus Christ and trust in God, we accept the grace of God.
- C. Salvation is only from God.
1. Works cannot achieve salvation.
 - a. Being good is not good enough.

- b. There are only two kinds of religions in the world; works and grace.
- 2. No one can boast about saving oneself.
 - a. We do not save ourselves.
 - b. Applic. - The Bible claims to be the only way. There is salvation in no other.

IV. PERFORM GOOD WORKS TO GLORIFY GOD, V. 10

- A. We are God's work of art.
 - 1. The word, workmanship, is similar to the word for poetry.
 - 2. The great work of transformation displays God's greatness.
 - 3. Applic. - People will say, "I am going to Heaven because I am a rather good person." There is a better way to express the role of our good deeds. "I am not going to Heaven because I am good. I am good because I am going to Heaven by God's grace."
- B. God created us to do good works.
 - 1. God designed us to do good works.
 - 2. Illus. - After visiting Disney World, someone commented he wished Walt Disney had lived long enough to see what he had produced. An insightful person replied, "He saw all of this in his mind." Entertainment parks cannot compare to what God has prepared for us to become. God designed us before we were born with plans for us to do good works.
 - 3. Each of us has at least one spiritual gift for God to use.

CONCLUSION - A Christian group sings *Crucified with Christ*, which is our story about salvation.

When I look back at what I thought was living
 I'm amazed at the price I chose to pay
 And to think I ignored what really mattered
 'Cause I thought the sacrifice would be too great
 But when I finally reached the point of giving in
 I found the cross was calling then
 And even though it took dying to survive
 I've never felt so much alive
 For I am crucified with Christ and yet I live
 Not I but Christ that lives within me