

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God
Made Alive Together With Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 7, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ **Within the English language, there is one small monosyllable word that has the potential to utterly change the course of your life.** You could be in the darkest of dark places, without hope, without joy. In the lowest of lows. And with one word, you could be lifted to the highest of heights, filled with hope, walking joyfully in the light.
 - ▶ What's that word? **It's the simple conjunction: *but*.** Think about it. You're at work and you get a call from your child's school. You're told there's been a shooting. Your heart stops. Then you hear, "*But* the shooter has been subdued and your child is safe."
 - You're at the doctor's office and she gives you the diagnosis. It's cancer. Stage 4. You're floored. "*But*", she goes on to say, "there's this experimental drug that has delivered amazing results. We're very confident we can beat this."

- ❖ One little word changes so much. Well when it comes to the Bible, add to it one more monosyllable word and those two together change everything. Those two words are found here in v4, "But God".
 - ▶ **James Montgomery Boice**, the late pastor of Tenth Avenue Presbyterian in Philadelphia, once said, "*May I put it quite simply? If you understand those two words—'but God'—they will save your soul. If you recall them daily and live by them, they will transform your life completely.*"

- ❖ Author **Casey Lute** took that idea and wrote a whole book called "*But God...: The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel*". In it, he looks at nine occurrences of "But God" in the English Bible, and he shows us how everything hinges on those two words.
 - ▶ He says whenever you come across "but God" in your Bible, to the left of it are some of the worst atrocities in human history. There's rebellion, there's violence, there's death, there's hopelessness and despair. But to the right of those words you'll find mercy, love, and grace. You'll find hope and newness of life. **The words "but God" perfectly capture the heart of the Gospel.** If you understand them, they'll save your soul and change your life entirely.

- ❖ And that's the problem for many of us. We've trusted Christ. We've given our lives to God. **But our lives have not changed as you'd expect for a Christian. We're not walking in a manner worthy of a Christian.** But that, of course, is Paul's reason for writing. He says it at the beginning of chapter 4. Look there with me. "*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*".
 - ▶ **It's typical for Paul to begin his letters with an exposition of doctrine and end with exhortations where the doctrinal truths are applied to his readers.** In Ephesians, the transition happens in chapter 4:1. In chapters 1-3 Paul is laying out gospel truths – things that are true of you if you are in Christ. And then in chapters 4-6, if these things are true of you, then you ought to live like this. **His chief concern is for his readers to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called. To live a life that testifies to the phrase "but God".**

- ❖ *Could that be said of you and your life?* Does it bear witness to this “but God” transformation? Or is it more like “but nothing”? Nothing much has changed. Nothing much is different. This is what worries many of us.
- ❖ If Paul were counseling us he would say, "Remember." Remember what? **Remember who you are and where you came from.** That's what he's reminding us of in vv1-10. And in both v11 and v12 he says it outright, "Remember." Who you are and where you came from.
 - ▶ I know that sounds like pop psychology. But here's the difference. The contemporary gurus of self-help are going to say the answer is found within. You look inside yourself to find the answers. But Christianity says, “**No, inside yourself is where you find the problems.** The answer to who you are and where you’re from is found by looking outside yourself and to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”
 - In the gospel, you're reminded of **the grimness of your former life without Christ**, your life of utter spiritual deadness (that's where you're from). But balance that by recalling **the glory of the new life you now share with Christ** (that's who you are).
- ❖ That's what Paul's reminding of us in these verses. I've divided up this passage into three parts. **1)** In vv1-3, he reminds us who we are by nature. **2)** In vv4-7, he reminds us what we can become by grace. And **3)** in vv8-10 Paul reminds us how we ought to live by faith.

Who We Are By Nature

- ❖ Let's start by looking at vv1-3 and considering who we are by nature. **For Christians this gives us a better sense of where we came from. And for nonChristians, this is where you are now, from a biblical sense.** And let me just warn you right now, it doesn't look pretty. Just as we've said before, in Christ you're richer than you think. In the flesh, in your fallen human nature, you're poorer than you'd like to think.
- ❖ **First, let's consider who Paul's talking about here.** When he says “*you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked*”, the *you* is referring to the Ephesians who were largely Gentiles. They came from very pagan backgrounds where they worshipped a pantheon of gods. They bowed to idols and participated in a range of immoral practices, . **You – as in *you pagans* – were dead in your trespasses and sins.**
 - ▶ But he doesn't stop there. In v3 he includes himself and fellow Jewish believers. Notice Paul says, “*we all once lived in the passions of our flesh*”. **So in regards to this deadness, he's not exempting monotheistic, morally-upright, law-abiding individuals such as himself.** We all once lived this way – in deadness.
- ❖ And at the end of v3, in case anyone tries to convince himself that he's the exception, Paul throws in the “*rest of mankind*”. **What he's describing here applies to everyone.** It's universal to the human condition. That means if you read vv1-3 with the tendency to think of certain individuals or groups of people – then you're missing Paul's point. He's writing about you just as much as he's writing about me, and those people you have in mind.

- ❖ *Now what is he trying to say about us?* He says we were dead, but obviously he doesn't mean physically dead. **Paul has in mind a living deadness.** We're not talking about zombies. But Scripture is saying you can be dead yet still "*walk*" and still "*follow*" outside influences (v2). Your flesh can still feel "*passions*", and your body and mind can still have "*desires*" (v3).
 - ▶ **This is describing a spiritual deadness.** Just think back to the Garden of Eden. When God placed Adam in the Garden, he warned what would happen if you ate from that tree. "*For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" (Gen. 2:17) But when it finally happened, Adam didn't drop dead on that day. It says he lived for 930 years.
 - So was God just kidding about *surely* dying in that day you eat of the tree? Or did he just change his mind? No, the Bible's clear that on that day a curse fell on Adam and his line. **So that Adam and Eve and all their progeny (that includes us) are, by nature, born alive yet born dead.**

- ❖ **Our hearts** work just fine in terms of beating and pumping blood through our veins. But, by nature, they're cold and dead in terms of love towards God or sensitivity towards his Spirit. **Our minds** are functioning in terms of processing data and recalling memories. But, by nature, they're lifeless and ignorant to the glory of Christ and his gospel.
 - ▶ In terms of biological life, all of us here are alive and well. **But in terms of spiritual life, there very well are people here – and people in your life – who are as unresponsive as a corpse is to God and the gospel.** They're spiritually dead.

- ❖ And yet they walk. Paul says they walk in trespasses and sins. And maybe *walked* is too soft of a word. He's not talking about a pleasant stroll. **To say we walked in our trespasses and sins means we were led along by the nose.** It says here in v2 we were following "*the course of this world*" and "*the prince of the power of the air*".
 - ▶ The course of this world is another way to say (lit.) the age of this world or the ways of this world. **So the point is, by nature, we are products of our culture.** We instinctively drink up whatever this world is serving.

- ❖ Just think of all the various *-isms* in the world. We're so influenced by **secularism** which rejects God. By **relativism** which rejects any absolutes. By **materialism** which deifies the people, pursuits, or possessions in your life. We're influenced more than we'd like to admit by **racism** (which deified our ethnicity/culture), by **sexism** (deifying our gender), or by **classism** (deifying our status).
 - ▶ **Do you think the trespasses and sins we commit come from a vacuum?** No, we're shaped and influenced by our culture. That's what Paul means by following the course of this world.

- ❖ **And there's also the prince of the power of the air.** We're following him too. This is a clear reference to the devil. He's the "*spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*".
 - ▶ For Paul to call him "the prince of the power of the air" is not to suggest the devil has sovereign reign of some portion of this world. But it is a nod to his influence, his power to influence us and fool us into following him in imitating his disobedience.

- ❖ **But before we go around blaming our trespasses and sins on the devil or on the culture, Paul goes on in v3 to pin the blame most fundamentally on ourselves.** Yes, we're guilty of following the world's lead and the devil's, but in the end we're just living out the "*passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind*".
 - ▶ It's statements like this from Paul that bother the secular mind. It sounds so prudish. Christians are so uptight, especially when it comes to "*the desires of the body*". And they're usually focused on sex. They'll say, "Come on, Paul, can't you just accept that sex is natural? It's a healthy bodily desire. It shouldn't be condemned or shamed."

- ❖ But that's not a fair assessment. By speaking negatively of "the desires the body", **Paul's not suggesting that our bodily desires for food, drink, sleep, or sex are bad in themselves.** But he is saying that sin has corrupted our desires, so that the desire for food becomes gluttony; drink becomes drunkenness; sleep becomes slothfulness; sex becomes lustfulness.

- ❖ So that means even if we lived in cultural isolation and if, for some reason, the devil were to leave us alone, by our own nature we would walk away from God. We are – as Paul says at the end of v3 – "*by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*"
 - ▶ Now that statement also offends modern sensibilities. **The idea of God having wrath against us or being angry with us doesn't sit well with many.** Isn't God a God of love? Then how can you describe him as wrathful?
 - But that's exactly what Paul does. In the span of two verses (vv3-4) he speaks of God's wrath and great love with great ease. It's no contradiction for him.

- ❖ To argue that a loving God cannot be a wrathful God is to misunderstand the relationship between love and wrath. They're not mutually exclusive emotions. **The opposite of love is not wrath. The opposite of love is indifference.**
 - ▶ If you see blatant evil being perpetrated and hurting someone you claim to love – if you're not angry, if you don't feel wrath against that evil, then you don't really love that person. You're anything but loving. **You're just indifferent.**
 - Love cares enough to hate evil. To be angry with evil. That makes sense. We don't have a problem with that. **We want God to hate evil, to be angry with evil. But then we have to accept the reality that the evil that Paul's talking about here lies within us.**

- ❖ **The only way you'll come to grips with the idea that we are, by nature, children of God's wrath is if you accept the biblical view of sin. If you think human sin is merely the result of ignorance,** then the appropriate response from God would be pity not anger. And what we need is for him to send a Good Moral Teacher to save us from our ignorance.
 - ▶ **If you think our sinfulness is fundamentally a disease of the soul,** then God's appropriate response would be compassion not anger. And what we need most is for him to send a Divine Healer to save us from our sickness.

- ❖ **If you think sinners are essentially victims**, that sin's a form of acting out in response to the abuse we've suffered, the appropriate response from God would be sympathy not anger. And what we need more than ever is a Cosmic Therapist to come and heal our emotional wounds.
 - ▶ **But the biblical view is that sin is, first and foremost, an evil that harms God's creation and offends God's character, and so the appropriate response from God is righteous anger. And what we need most of all is for him to send a Savior who will bear that anger in our place and make it possible for sinners like us to be reconciled with that holy and righteous God.**

What We Can Become By Grace

- ❖ And that's exactly the good news of the Christian faith summed up in those two little words in v4. Look there, *"⁴But God, being rich in mercy"*. **We were poor in spirit. We were lacking in righteous. But God was rich in mercy.** Great mercy that translates into great love. Keep reading, *"because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."*
 - ▶ **So just as vv1-3 tell us who we are by nature, vv4-7 tell us what we can become by grace.** This is our second point. And what we can become is alive – spiritually alive to God. With a new mind that can comprehend the things of God. And new heart that has new affections and new passions for God. And a new nature that has new desires aimed at pleasing God not the flesh.
- ❖ This is what it happens when you get saved. If you claim to be saved, but this kind of spiritual aliveness is foreign to you – if it's not characteristic of your life – then maybe you're fooling yourself. **Because being saved is not about agreeing that Jesus died and rose again to forgive sins. Demons agree that's true, and yet they're not saved.** They remain spiritually dead and under God's wrath.
 - ▶ **To be saved is a work of God's sovereign grace where he takes your dead soul and resurrects it back to life.** He takes the immeasurable greatness of his power, the great might used to raise Christ from the dead (1:19-20), and God puts to work in us.
- ❖ There are three things God does in us when he saves us by grace, and they all pertain to something we experience *with* Christ. In v5, we're **a)** made alive together with Christ. Then in v6, we're **b)** raised up with Christ, and we're **c)** seated with him in the heavenly places.
 - ▶ **Those three things refer to key events in Jesus's redemptive work: His resurrection, his ascension, and his session** (his seating at God's right hand). Each is found in the **Apostle's Creed** where it says, *"On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he sits at the right hand of God the Father"*.
- ❖ And what's amazing is that Paul's not recounting what happened to Christ. He did that back in chapter 1:20-21. **But here, in vv5-6, Paul's talking about what has happened to us – to believers in Christ.** We actually share in Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and session by virtue of our union with him.

- ❖ Look with me at v5. God in his love, "*made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*". Now if the verbs were in the future tense, then there's no surprise. If it said, "he *will* make us alive; he *will* resurrect us together with Christ; he *will* raise us up with him; and he *will* seat us with him in the heavenly places", then it makes sense to us. We expect these things for the future.
 - ▶ **But the amazing and baffling thing is that Paul's speaking in the past tense.** We *were* resurrected with Christ. We *were* raised up with him. We *were* seated with him in the heavenly places. How are we to understand this? **Is Paul just speaking figuratively? No, he's speaking federally.**

- ❖ If you're a Christian, you've been brought into a personal relationship with Christ, but that's only possible because **you were first brought into a federal relationship with Christ.** Jesus becomes our federal head, our representative. In our federal government, our federal head is the president. He's the head of the nation. He represents and speaks for all the citizens.
 - ▶ Now in Christian theology, to be in a federal relationship with Christ goes further. Jesus, as our federal head, represents us in a much deeper way. **By virtue of a covenantal union we share with him, everything Jesus experienced – we experienced.** Everything Jesus went through – we went through. Everything he accomplished – we accomplished. All because we share a covenantal union.

- ❖ **Just think about the marital union shared between husband and wife.** If you didn't have any debt going into marriage but your spouse did – now you're in debt. If you didn't own a car going into marriage but your spouse did – now you have a car. There's a federal headship within marriage. The assets and debts of the one accrues to the other. Why? Because of their union. They are legally, covenantally, federally one.
 - ▶ **Or imagine you're going to court with a defense attorney.** That attorney is in a federal relationship with you. He's your federal head. If your attorney makes motion, it's for you. You're making a motion. If he does a good job, then all the benefits of that accrues to you. And if he does a horrible job, then you're in trouble. If he lost the case, you lost the case. That's how it works.

- ❖ **This is what Paul says happened between you and Jesus the moment you were saved, the moment you were brought into a covenantal, federal union with him.** When he died to sin, *you* died to sin. When he was resurrected, *you* were resurrected (made alive). When he ascended to the Father, *you* ascended to the Father. When he sat down at the right hand of God, *you* sat down at the right hand of God.

- ❖ I know this can be confusing. Because you know (and I know) that you're sitting right there in that pew. Not at the right hand of God. So Paul must not be speaking literally. He must be speaking figuratively. But I'd be careful not to speak that way. **To say Paul's speaking figuratively suggests that he's not describing something real.** That you're not *really* at the right hand of God. That it's just a metaphor, just figurative language.

- ❖ No, it's federal language. He's speaking federally. **You may not be there physically at the right hand of God, but you are there federally. And that's real.** You really are there at the right hand of God – because Christ really is there.
 - ▶ If you give someone power of attorney, then they can be in a meeting where you're not physically present. But you're still really there. Everything that person says or does – you are saying and you are doing. That's how it works.

- ❖ So meditate on this. **If you are in Christ, right now you are seated at the right hand of God. You are welcomed by his side.** You are accepted in his eyes. He sees you seated and clothed in his Son's righteousness. You are supping with him by his side at his table.
 - ▶ This sheds so much light on Paul's statement to the **Colossians 3:1** where he tells them, *"¹If you then have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."* **Yes, seek the things that are above where Christ is – because that's where you are.**
 - *"²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, ad your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* (3:2-4)

- ❖ So **remember where you came from** – from spiritual deadness, from spiritual rebellion, from under the just wrath of God. And now **remember who you are** by virtue of your union with Christ. Together with him, you are spiritually alive and eternally secure in your relationship with God, enjoying personal fellowship while seated at his right hand. All of that is captured in those two words: but God.

How We Ought To Live By Faith

- ❖ So now how ought we to live in response to all this? **How can our lives testify to this kind of "but God" transformation?** Let's conclude with our last point: How we ought to live by faith. Let's keep reading in v7. It says God has saved us and raised us up and seated us with Christ at this side, *"so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*
 - ▶ Try to recall the last time you saw that word *immeasurable* in Ephesians. It was in chapter 1:19. There Paul says that in raising and exalting Christ, God was demonstrating the *"immeasurable greatness of his power"*. And now in raising and exalting us with Christ, God is demonstrating the *"immeasurable riches of his grace"*.

- ❖ So in accomplishing salvation, the immeasurable greatness of God's power was magnified. And now in applying that salvation personally to us who believe, God intends for the immeasurable richness of his grace to be magnified. **You were saved by grace for the sake of magnifying grace.**
 - ▶ So that's how we ought to live. To live life in such a way where all boasting ceases, where all ego is silenced, where the attention is shifted off us and onto God's grace – to his undeserved kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

- ❖ **But the thing is we won't live this way in Christ unless we're cognizant of how we once lived in the flesh.** Unless we always remember the life we were saved from – where we walked in our trespasses and sins – then we're not ready to live the life we've been saved for – where we walk in our good works.
- ❖ **If you want to live a life that magnifies God's grace, then make vv8-10 your life motto.** If you have yet to memorize these three verses, make it a goal this week. Live your life under this banner, *“⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*
- ❖ **Do you believe that everything in your life that brings you joy, that gives you significance, that's of eternal value, is a gift of God?** That even the good works you do were prepared for you well beforehand, before the foundation of the world?
 - ▶ Think with me. ***What are the accomplishments in your life that you're most proud of?*** Perhaps it's all the good friendships you've made at school or the reputation you've built in being a good friend. Maybe it's your marriage or your kids. For some of you it's the work you do or the ministry you're invested in or some contribution you've made (or plan to make) to the betterment of society. **Whatever it is, you feel like this is why God put you on this earth – to do this good work.**
- ❖ Paul confirms that in v10. He says God prepared beforehand that you should accomplish those things. There's really no room for boasting once you realize that your salvation and every good work derived from it is all a gift of grace.
 - ▶ **Sinners saved by grace – who understand everything has been carefully prepared for you and delivered as a gift – have no room to boast.** No need to boast or boost our ego. We've got nothing to prove. We're already loved, accepted, and seated at God's right hand.
- ❖ So as the Church is invited in a moment to the communion table, let us partake with much humility and much gratitude. Remembering that we were once lost *but God* found us. We were once blind *but God* made us see. We were once rebels *but God* made peace through the body and the blood of his Son. We were once dead in our trespasses *but God* made us alive together with Christ.