

## *What God Has Done*

### **Scripture Text: Colossians 2:11-15**

Someone once said, “If there were only a half-dozen words in our vocabulary, “Grace” should be one of them.”

For you see – Grace is the difference between the sinner’s plight and the believer’s position in Christ.

If believers are to grow in God’s Grace, then we must understand what happened to us by His Grace.

In Ephesians 2:8 it reads, “*For by grace are you saved.*”

There is no greater need in a person’s life then the need to be saved.

And there is no greater provision from God then His perfect plan of salvation through His Son Jesus.

Every one of us has had great experiences in our past.

- For some, it was an accomplishment or award.
- For others it was a special event.
- For still others it was a special someone.

Unfortunately, the memory of those things fades with the passage of time.

Remember the first time you held your child in your hands?

Believe it or not – I can still remember the first time I held Chris in my hands.

What a special day that was, but it’s not as fresh in my memory as it once was.

But some of the wonder, some of the awe has faded over time.

For some it may be a wedding day . . .the day was one of the greatest in your life.

But over the years the details that weren't saved on film have become hazy.

We still remember and are grateful but it's not the same.

I contend that our salvation is like one of those events.

When we first believed we had a joy and an awe that was like when your child was born.

But, as time goes on, the joy and the sense of awe fades.

It's not that we no longer appreciate our salvation.

Or that we are not grateful to God.

Because we are.

We wouldn't trade our standing in Christ for anything the world has to offer.

But the glory has dimmed.

That's why it is good to linger over verses such as those before us this morning.

It's like looking through a photo album or watching a video of the past.

These verses become a vivid reminder of what our salvation is all about.

These words remind us of how we came to believe in Christ.

They stir up the embers and fan the flame of devotion anew.

## **I. GOD HAS CHANGED US**

The Apostle Paul says,

*In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of your sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the*

*hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.* (vv.11-12)

As you read these words, if you are like me, your first response is, "Huh?"

What in the world do these two verse have to do with my life in Christ?

### **Let me Give you The Background**

We are at a disadvantage because we are not aware of the situation that was going on in Colosse.

As you recall, there were false teachers in the city.

They sounded good, they quoted lots of Bible verses, people were talking about the difference that was being made in their lives . . . but they were leading people away from the truth.

They were leading them to depend on themselves, not God.

It appears that one of the things these false teachers were proclaiming was that circumcision was one of the things required before you could be made right with God.

Circumcision was a Jewish rite that took place on the 8th day after the birth of a baby boy.

The boy would be circumcised as a visible symbol that this child was part of God's community of faith.

It was a visible reminder that they were one of God's children.

So significant was this rite that when Moses neglected to circumcise his child, God threatened to kill Moses!

### **The Point**

The false teachers said circumcision was required for salvation.

But Paul throughout his letters makes it a point to show that Abraham was justified BEFORE he was circumcised.

He also emphasizes the need for a circumcision of the heart.

Paul says this internal transformation is what is important.

Paul then argues that this is something only God can do.

Look at these verses again with a few clarifying comments.

*"In him (not in the temple) you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature (not of the flesh of*

*the male foreskin), not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ."*

Paul then uses the analogy of baptism to finish his point, *"having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."*

We are made right with God not by the act of baptism but by the faith in the one who raised Christ from the dead!

We are not saved on the basis of our external ritual . . . but on the basis of who we trust.

Now we don't have people telling us that we need to be circumcised before we can be saved today, but there are lots of people prone to give us a long list of things we need to DO or BECOME before we can be saved.

- Some point to good we must do.
- Others point to habits we must eliminate

Paul however says, *"conversion starts in the heart!"*

We must be saved before we can be changed and not the other way around!

## **II. HE HAS GIVEN SPIRITUAL LIFE TO US**

Paul continues, "*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.*" (v. 13).

## Where We Were

Notice Paul says "*we were dead in our sins*".

He says the same thing in Ephesians, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air . . .*" (2:1,2)

Notice what Paul is NOT saying,

- He is not saying that we were handicapped.
- He did not say that we were sick.
- He did not say that we were misguided by our social surroundings.
- He says we were dead!
- We were without any spiritual life at all!

Paul drives home his point with vigor in Romans 3,

*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.* [emphasis mine] (3:10-12)

Do you grasp Paul's point?

We were not only unable to return to God . . . we had no DESIRE to turn to God.

This is what theologians call total inability or total depravity.

It means we are unable and unwilling to do anything to effect our own salvation.

This is why Jesus said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*" (Jn. 6:44).

We are UNABLE to come to Christ unless he first does something in us.

This is what Jesus means when He says we "*must be born again.*"

## God Made us Alive

What profound words these are, "*but God made you alive in Christ.*"

I think it was Charles Spurgeon who said the most glorious word in scripture is this word "**BUT**".

He refers to this verse and the parallel verse in Ephesians 2 . . . "*we were dead . . . BUT GOD made us alive.*"

Again, notice what the verse does NOT say.

- He does not say: "God helped us to change" or

- "God helped me to do what is right" or "God helped me overcome my weakness."
- It says ***GOD MADE US ALIVE.***

This understanding of "regeneration" or "quickenning" was one of the most profound discoveries of my life.

Ephesians 2:8,9 states it best, "*For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - AND THIS not from yourselves, it is a gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.*" [emphasis mine].

Even our faith was something that God gave us.

He is responsible for our salvation!

- God is the Source of our Salvation
- That means that God initiated salvation and completed it in us.

He alone makes it possible for you and I to be a child of God.

In the Reformation the cry was Sola Gratia!

It means by Grace Alone.

And that is Paul's emphasis here.

We can do nothing to effect our salvation.

He must first move in us to bring us spiritual life.

He must do this before we even realize that we have sinned and are in need of a Savior.

Why is this important?

- Because there is a growing notion in our ego-filled society that we are saved because of what WE do .
- . . not because of what CHRIST DOES in us. In other words, we are diminishing the work of grace in our life.

Max Lucado speaks with his usual clarity,

**think back to your own birth. . .Look at yourself. Brand-new. New hands. New eyes. New mouth. No pre-owned parts. . . Now tell me, who gave you these parts? Who gave you eyes so you could see? Who gave you hands so you could work? Who gave you feet that you could walk? Did you make your own eyes? Your own hands? Your own feet?**

No, you made nothing; God made everything.

He was the one who made everything new the first time, and he is the one who makes everything new the second.

The Creator creates again! "***If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything else is made new!***" (2 Cor. 5:17)

But the analogy contains another truth.

May I ask another question about your birth?

How active were you in the process?

Did you place your hands against the top of the womb and shove yourself out?

Were you in radio communication with your mother, telling her when to push?

Did the doctor ask you to measure the contractions and report on conditions inside the womb? . . . Hardly.

You were passive.

You were not born because of what you did.

Someone else did all the work.

Someone else felt all the pain.

Your mom did the pushing and the struggling.

Your birth was due to someone else's effort.

### **Spiritual Application:**

The same is true for our spiritual birth.

It is through God's pain that we are born.

It's not our struggle, but God's.

It's not our blood shed, but His. (A Gentle Thunder p. 108, 109)

This is the point Paul wants to make.

The false teachers were telling the people that it was all up to them.

They wanted them to work harder, run faster, do more.

And many tried.

They spent more time looking back than looking forward.

Paul says, *"You've got it wrong! God is the one who makes the changes. He is the one who brings life. We need a brand new beginning . . . and only God can do that."*

### **III. HE FORGAVE US**

What wonderful words these are: **"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."**

## The scope of forgiveness

Do you hear the declaration "*He forgave us all our sins*"?

How many of our sins? ALL.

- Not just the past sins,
- not just the present sins,
- not just the big sins,
- not just the little sins . . . . but ALL of them.

Do you get it?

- It means those times in your past that plague you with guilt . . . He forgave those sins.
- And those times when you let others down and hurt them . . . He forgave those sins too.
- And all those times you promised you did something for the last time . . . and then you fell again . . . God forgave those in Christ too.
- He forgives the hidden sins and the public sins.

**Here's the problem**, we think God is like other Christians . . . He is waiting for you to fail and then will never let you hear the end of it.

Thank God He is not that way!

What would your life be like if you believed this truth?

You would spend less time regretting the past and more time living the present

You would be less concerned about keeping people at "arms distance" (for fear they discover the "real you") and be more willing to be open with those around you.

You would justify less and confess more.

You would spend less time licking your wounds and more time counting your blessings

You would find it easier to forgive others

You would love Him more

## The method of forgiveness

How is this possible?

Paul tells us that God canceled the written code that was against us.

Think of it as if you owned a business.

You know that income must meet or exceed expenses.

If the debit side of the ledger gets too high you are in great danger.

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You could lose your business, you might have to declare bankruptcy.

You could lose everything.

Now suppose you were running at a \$100,000.00 deficit.

The creditors want their money but you have no reserves.

Everything is sunk into this business.

You are in trouble and see no way out.

Now suppose someone came in and handed you a check for \$250,000.00 as a gift.

What would happen to the debt?

It would be canceled.

And you would have \$150,000.00 of working capital (less your tithe to the church, of course!) to help you get the business up and running.

### **Spiritual Application:**

Now apply this to your spiritual life: all the sins of your life are on the negative side of the balance sheet.

There is nothing on the positive side (Nothing!) of the ledger.

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When it is totaled up you see that the debt of sin makes the federal deficit look like pocket change.

- You are responsible!
- You incurred the debt.
- You deserve the punishment.
- The law condemns you.
- But . . . God makes you alive.
- He pays off the debt and guarantees your operating capital.

How?

He pays for our sin in Christ's life and death.

It was common practice for the ones who were condemned to die on a cross to have their crimes posted above their head.

Above the head of Jesus imagine a listing of your sin.

He died in your place.

His goodness was applied to your account.

Your debt was canceled.

God not only took care of the law . . . he also took care of those who were so eager to accuse us.

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The powers and authorities of the world (Satan and his cohorts) are those who are always telling us that we are unworthy.

They were quick to say, "anyone who loved God would never act the way you do."

But God broke their power.

They can talk but that's all.

They have no power over you.

You are set free.

You can now respond to these scoundrels,

"You are right, Satan, I do not deserve to be called one of His children. And I am so glad that my hope of eternity is not based on my efforts but on what Christ has done for me!"

## **CONCLUSIONS**

How should we respond to all this?

It is my hope that the embers of wonder and awe have been stirred once again in your heart.

I hope you have been reminded anew of the privilege you have to be called a child of God.

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Let me suggest **five responses to these truths:**

### **1) Gratitude-**

If we understand what has been given to us we will be grateful to God for the rest of our lives.

No matter what life throws at us . . . we will not complain . . . but only give thanks that we did not get what we deserved.

We will be grateful that we have God's strength, power, provision in our lives.

We will spend the rest of our lives saying, "Why me?"

### **2) Humility –**

If we understand the true message of the gospel there is no room for smugness.

There is no room for feelings of superiority.

What do you have that you have not been given?

What basis for arrogance do you have?

You are not a believer because of your goodness, your deeds, or even your decisions.

You are a believer because God made you alive when you were dead.

### 3) Confidence.

We no longer need to fear in our living. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

Of course that answer to that question is: "all kinds of people".

But the real message is, "If God is on your side, who can take eternal life from you?"

To that we answer "No one".

If the Son has set you free . . . you are free indeed.

We no longer need to live hesitantly.

We can live with the boldness that comes from being a child of the King.

### 4) Holiness

When we understand what God has done for us the natural and appropriate desire is to honor Him in return.

We want to live our lives to please Him and please Him.

We know we cannot "pay Him back".

But we can honor Him with our lives.

We can seek to do what He asks and go where He leads.

This is the response of a true believer.

We serve, not because we want to gain eternal life . . .  
.we serve because we love Him.

### 5) Surrender.

What about you?

Are you trying to run faster, jump higher, and push the right buttons?

Are you willing to stop running and start trusting the one who has promised to transform you?

Are you willing to accept the free and undeserved riches of His grace?

Has He awakened you today?

If so, respond in faith.

Would you be willing to come to this altar this morning and say in your heart, "Lord Jesus, I don't know why you would love me like you do . . . but I'm glad you do. Today I confess my utter inability to save myself and place my trust completely on Christ's

work on my behalf. Today I am willing to follow you."

Ah, Christian friend?

Do you remember the day you first believed?

Do you remember where you were headed and how He changed you completely?

Have you begun to drift?

Are you beginning to try to earn your salvation again?

Are you teaching others that they need to earn theirs?

Are the feelings of joy and gratitude filling your heart once again.

If so, that's good.

And when that reality begins to dim.

When you begin to get "fuzzy" on the nature of your salvation, come back to the Book.

Read it again.

Remember anew.

And Rest in His Grace.

**Invitation:**