

REGENERATION AND RECONCILIATION (Concluded)

Ephesians 2:4-13

III. How We Were Changed.

1. He loved us. 2:4.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love wherewith He loved us." Here Paul leaves the character of man and leads us to contemplate the character of God. We should note the following characteristics of love:

(1) Love thinks of its objects.

It therefore clears away all the difficulties and impediments in order to reach it. How blessedly true this is of God's love in Christ to reach the unworthy and the lost!

(2) Love seeks fellowship with its object.

How condescending and precious to know and enjoy this! John 14:23 says: "We will come and make our abode with Him."

(3) Love suffers for its object.

The affection which does not abide this test is not genuine. At least five times, we read that Christ gave Himself.

(4) Love seeks to exalt its object.

So God's mercy (vs. 4), love (vs. 4), grace (vs. 7), and kindness (vs. 7), have exalted every believer so much that he or she is not only saved (vs. 5), but greater still, is seated in the heavenlies in Christ. The riches of His mercy are seen in the degradation and ruin from which it delivers us; in the glory and blessedness to which we are raised; and in the myriads of the Saviour.

2. He rescued us. 2:5.

"By grace ye are saved." Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. Man must accept it as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. This is illustrated in a statement by Dr. Alexander Maclaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh, Scotland. Not long before his death his associate minister, Mr. Gustart, visited him and inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Whereupon Dr. Maclaren replied, "I'll tell you what I'm doing, brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard and swim to glory on the plank of free grace."

During this life we shall never understand the complete meaning of grace. However, we do know this, that God's grace is His boundless love freely expressed toward those who are entirely undeserving. Grace means the unmerited love and favor and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It is His love in action toward lost people, rescuing them from their fallen condition and giving them eternal life. Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need." The Apostle Paul said, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7. Oh, what a wondrous plan that He pitied us, loved us, suffered for us, and died for us in order that we might be saved! Our only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In lovingkindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace He lifted me."

3. He raised us. 2:6a.
"And raised us up together." It is a blessed assurance to know that you are saved for time and eternity; that you have been lifted out of the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of Christ.
4. He saved us. 2:8.
"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Every word is emphatic here. This salvation by grace is the very opposite of salvation by works, and it characterizes the gospel of Christ as distinguished from all other forms of religion. This salvation by grace, however, is received through faith. On the part of God, salvation is by grace. On the part of man, salvation is through faith. Faith is the ear that hears His voice, the eye that sees God's riches, and the hand that receives the gift. This very faith, Paul adds, is the gift of God. Men receive salvation directly and immediately upon the exercise of faith in Christ.
5. By the blood of Christ. 2:13.
"Ye who once were afar off are become near by the blood of the Christ." This is the only means that could effect such a change.

IV. Why Were We Changed.

1. That He might rescue us from doom.
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.
2. That we might do good works. 2:10.
"For His workmanship we are, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that in them we should walk." Good works please Him and secure His approbation. Good works will not come from the life of an unregenerate person.
3. That His grace might have an adequate manifestation. 2:7.
"That He might show in the ages that are coming the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." In this present age we see much of God's goodness and grace towards us through Christ in His saving, keeping, satisfying fulness. But in the ages to come we shall be witnesses of the glory which is to follow, which is far greater and just as certain as anything He has done or is doing.