

REGENERATION AND RECONCILIATION

Ephesians 2:5-22

In our previous study of this chapter we considered our past condition--what we were before we were saved. According to God's Word, as recorded in this chapter, we discovered that in our natural state we were dead in trespasses and sins, we were disobedient to God, we were deserving of wrath, we were Gentiles in the flesh--meaning that we belonged to the great unsaved mass of humanity, we were without Christ, we were without a place among God's people, we were without a share in God's covenants, we were without hope and we were without God in a world teeming with evidences of His power.

Four words somewhat describe our pitiful plight when we were unsaved--helpless, hopeless, homeless and godless. That is the picture of every Christian before he believed on Christ.

The subject of man in his natural state is vitally related to the whole question of redemption. Only when a person realizes that he is a depraved and ruined sinner will he understand and know that he needs a divine Saviour. By depravity we mean man's lack of original righteousness and of holy affection toward God, the corruption of his moral nature and his bias toward evil. It consists of the lack of love for God as required by him and the setting up of some other object or objects in the human affection. Self-love is the substitute for love for God. Depravity is that state of nature that causes man to put self in the place of God, and to seek the gratification, honor and interest of self as the ultimate end of all action.

Total depravity means that the mind is defiled (Genesis 6:5), the understanding is darkened (Ephesians 4:18), the heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), the conscience is defiled (Titus 1:15), the will is enslaved (Romans 7:18) and the affections are perverted (John 3:19). Every element and faculty of man's being has been weakened and depraved by sin. That man in his natural state is depraved is proved by the Bible, by observation and by experience.

Having learned the truth about our former condition, or what we were, we shall now center our thoughts on:

II. Our Present Position--What We Are.

1. We are quickened from the dead. 2:5.

"We also being dead in offences, he quickened us with the Christ." Between man's natural state and the one to which he is brought by divine grace there is as much difference as that which obtains between death and life in the natural realm. It is impossible for man to become a child of God unless the Spirit of God convicts him of his sin and the Son of God saves him therefrom. The Holy Spirit breathed into us the breath of a new life. He opened our eyes and enabled us to see the mysteries and realities of eternal things. The darkness passed away, and the true Light now shineth. The clouded promises have become as stars of the first magnitude. We are quickened from the dead.

2. We are saved from sin. 2:5b.

"By grace ye are saved." Today there are three teachings as to how people are saved. Some preach salvation by works alone, thus making man his own saviour and declaring Christ's death on the cross a useless sacrifice. Others teach that salvation is by grace and works, thereby making salvation dependent upon the grace of God plus man's own efforts, thus giving him some credit for his salvation and rendering it impossible without his works. Still others of us believe what the Bible says on this subject and teach with Paul that salvation is by grace alone and apart from any human effort or merit, thus making the Lord Jesus responsible for our salvation. This verse clearly states that salvation is by grace without any mixture of human works on the part of a saved person.

God's marvelous grace has provided salvation for all, and made it available to all classes in all ages. It offers salvation to all who will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It brings salvation to all who will receive the gift which it brings. Many attempt to achieve salvation through their personal efforts and meritorious works, even though God's Word repeatedly states that it is an impossibility. No one is ever saved by his own efforts because salvation is "not of yourselves." No one will ever be able to present his efforts and works to God and receive eternal life in exchange. We did not save ourselves, but Christ saved us. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Salvation is entirely God's gift to us. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

"Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

3. We are raised with Christ. 2:6.

"And raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus."
"He died for our sins, but he rose again for our justification." The same Almighty hand that was laid upon the body of the dead Christ and lifted Him up from Joseph's tomb to the highest seat in heaven was also laid upon the souls of Christians and lifted them up. He hath raised us up out of the old life. This transaction is completely finished.

"'Tis done; the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

"Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day;
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!"

4. We are seated in the heavenlies in Christ. 2:6.

"And raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." This fact is glorious in achievement, abounding in assurance and decisive in victory.

5. We are made nigh. 2:13.

"But now in Christ Jesus, ye who once were afar off are become near by the blood of the Christ." To be far off and to be near are sayings much in use among the Jews. Among them, to be near signifies to be in the favor of God, and to be far off means to be under His displeasure. When we trusted Christ the sins that separated us from God were put away. Since He brought us to God we have enjoyed the fellowship of the reconciled.

Hanging on the cross, between the heavens from which He came and the earth which would not have Him, He made peace between God and man. When He had done so He cried, "It is finished." Of His death on the cross and what it accomplished, William R. Newell wrote in the great gospel song "At Calvary."

"Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died
On Calvary.

"By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned
To Calvary.

"Now I've giv'n to Jesus ev'rything,
Now I gladly own Him as my King,
Now my raptured soul can only sing
Of Calvary.

"Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that bro't it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary.

"Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary."

6. We are His workmanship. 2:10.

"For His workmanship we are created in Christ Jesus for good works." We were created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of producing good works as believers. The whole work is gathered up in one word, "workmanship." It is an interesting word which appears only twice in the New Testament--once in Romans 1:20, where it is translated by the expression, "the things which are made," and then here in Ephesians 2:10. The Greek word, which is transliterated, is our English word, "poem." So the Holy Spirit wants us to see two poems--that of creation and that of redemption. While the former is wonderful in all of its splendor and beauty, the latter excels as the noblest work of God.

"'Twas great to call a world from naught,
'Twas greater to redeem!"

There is another side to this matter of good works. Not only were we created in Christ Jesus unto such, but God actually ordained that we should walk in them. We are not to do good works in order that we may be saved but because we are saved. The Lord has saved us in order that we may do good works. Good works are the very end of our new creation. As we plant trees in order that they may produce fruit, so the Lord expects us to perform good works after we have been saved. When we believed on Christ, our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and no one can erase them. We believed in order to receive salvation, and now we work for rewards. Good works are the desire of the redeemed soul. Since we were saved we have wanted to obey Christ, to show our faith in Him by our loyalty to His commands and to demonstrate our faith by translating it into conduct and character. The Lord has saved us in order that we may serve Him. Good works are the dividends or the fruits which our Lord receives from the salvation which He has given us. He expects us to walk in them habitually.

7. We are able to approach God. 2:18.

"For through him we have access both by one Spirit to the Father." The word access was used of those who secure for one the privilege of an interview with a sovereign. This approach or access to the King involves the three persons of the Godhead. Our approach is:

(1) Through the Son.

God the Son provides the way into the Father's presence through the blood of His cross. In John 14:6, our Lord declared: "No man cometh unto the Father but through me."

(2) By the Spirit.

When redemption has been wrought out for us, the Holy Spirit works it in us. The Holy Spirit conducts the saint into the presence of the Father.

(3) Unto the Father.

God the Father is the One into whose presence the believer is brought. It was in the Father's heart that the plan of redemption originated; from the Father the love and grace that gave the Son proceeded; now back to the Father comes the fruitage--a new man whom He can welcome into His immediate presence.

8. We are fellow-citizens with the saints. 2:19a.

"So then no longer are ye strangers and sojourners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God." The saints are God's children, those set apart and dedicated to Him.

9. We are God's household. 2:19b.

"So then no longer are ye strangers and sojourners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God." The Father's family is the center of His love and life.

10. The Lord's temple. 2:20-21.

"Being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord." The erection of any given structure requires certain basic elements. There must be the architect, then the materials and finally the actual construction itself involving the foundation and the superstructure.

This temple has for its foundation "the apostles and prophets," that is, the truth committed to them to teach concerning the one foundation. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I Corinthians 3:10-11. Christ Jesus is its chief cornerstone. He is also its secret of symmetry and growth.

11. The Spirit's habitation. 2:22.

"In whom also ye are being built together for a habitation of God in Spirit." When the Son returned to the Father's side, the Spirit was sent forth to earth, and He came claiming believers as His abiding place.