

The Christian's Past, Present, and Future—Part II

Ephesians 2:1-20

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We are going to recap a little bit. Here is what we do. We just teach the Bible. It is not important what I have to say. It is very important what this book has to say. Remember in chapter 1, Paul was saying, “I’m an apostle.” Remember, there were only a handful of these guys—14 guys that ever really called themselves *apostles*. Anyone else that calls themselves an apostle just really is not. Then he goes on to talk to us about the blessings. We talked about 10 blessings that we have as believers, and they are articulated here. How we are blessed, Ephesians 1:3 says, “with every spiritual blessing.” Then we see the number of times “in Him” is used. Notice in Ephesians 1:7, “in Him we have redemption”; verse 11, “in Him we were also made His inheritance”; verse 13, “In Him [when] ... you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation ... you were sealed.” We see then that Paul begins to pray for this group of people that are going to receive this circular letter—this letter that would go out to different churches. Where was Paul’s office at this time? He was in prison. Who was in charge at this time? It was Nero, and Nero was blaming the Christians for the fire that had occurred in Rome. So Nero was not very happy with the believers at this time. Secondly, there was a lot of paganism going on. There was a temple there to Diana. At that temple, there was a lot of ungodliness and things that should not be going on that were going on. Then, Paul writes a prayer that he begins to pray for them.

In Ephesians 2:1, we see our life before Christ. There are several words that describe this. In Ephesians 2:1, it says, “you were dead” before Christ. “You were dead.” There is some debate about what really constitutes being physically dead. Is it when there is no heartbeat? Is it when there is no brain activity? I will let other people debate what constitutes being physically dead. Spiritually speaking, we are dead when we no longer have the capacity to intake spiritual activity or no longer have an aptitude for spiritual things or no longer have an attitude for spiritual things.

Guilt

The very first thing concerning our past is that we were dead, we were disobedient, and we were destined for wrath. Let’s focus on the word *guilt*. *Guilt* is representative and emblematic of our past. “You were dead.” Ephesians 2:2, “the spirit now working in the disobedient.”

Grace

In Ephesians 2:4, what we see there is the transition from *guilt*—from being dead, from the old man—to *grace*. *Grace* is the second word tonight. The past was *guilt*. The present is *grace*. We talked about several things about grace. How we are recipients of mercy, in Ephesians 2:5. Then in verse 6, we saw that we are resurrected. So we have the life—the *zoe* life that we talked about. It is different than *bios*—biology. It is different than *sukay* (sp?)—the psychological soul. We have the *zoe* life, the abundant life. In John 10:10, Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may

have *it* more abundantly.” Supernatural living. We are recipients of His mercy. We are resurrected to new life. We are rewarded with Him. So there is the life, the lift, and the love—that constitutes grace. In the past, we walked in guilt “But God,” do you see it there in Ephesians 2:4? “But God.” That is the transition that takes place—transitioning from the past to the present. “But God.” We transition from guilt to grace.

III. The Christian’s Future Lies in Christ

Now, we are going to begin in Ephesians 2:7. Notice in verse 7 where it says, “so that in the coming ages.” In the past, there is guilt. In the present, there is grace. But in the “coming ages,” there is glory. Notice what the Bible has to say. In verse 7, “so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace in [His] kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” I want us to look at the future of the Christian. It is not guilt. It is not grace. It is glory. We are going to look at three great gospel words.

A. Three Great Gospel Words

1. Saved

The first great gospel word that we see here is the word *saved*. Notice what it says in verse 8, “For by grace you are saved.” I will always tell on myself. When I was a youngster, I was not raised in the church. I remember saying to someone, “Oh, being saved. That’s just a Baptist word.” And there could not be anything more naive than what I said because *saved* is not a Baptist word. *Saved* is a Bible word. The first great gospel word is the word *saved*.

I want to tell you about this word in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you are saved.” In the New Testament construction, the word *saved* is in the perfect tense. Here is what this means. It is a completed action that has both continuous and permanent results. God wants to give us this new destination in Christ, and He reminds us in verse 7 that we are finally going home, “He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace in [His] kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” That is what is promised to us—a new destination. The glories of heaven have to do with things like no death, no disease, no sorrow, no separation, no tears, eternity with Jesus. We will see the Father. It is a city beyond compare.

What we see in this first great gospel word is the word *saved*—perfect tense, completed action that has both permanent and continuous results. It is like this. Let’s say a man is shipwrecked and lost in the water. From the moment that he is taken out of the icy water into a life boat, that man is saved, though it might be hours before his feet actually touch the ground for his final destination. We find ourselves in that time of being saved but not being in that final destination. Why? This world is not our home. We are just passing through. The first great gospel word concerning the future of the believer in Christ is the word *saved*.

2. Grace

There is another word, and it actually comes first in Ephesians 2:7, “of His grace in [His] kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”⁸ For by grace you are saved.” The second great gospel word is the word *grace*. You might find it interesting that the word *grace* is used 150 times in the New Testament, about 75 times by the apostle Paul. Just in case you have not ever grasped the acronym or the acrostic that will help you remember what *grace* is. It is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. In other words, it is unmerited favor. We get from God something that is utterly undeserved—the favor of God. Aren’t you glad that God reached down to offer cool water to our dry, desperate, depraved, dead soul and saved us? The first

great gospel word for our future is *saved*. The second is by *grace*.

3. *Faith*

For the third great gospel word, notice what it says in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you are saved through faith.” You may know that the Bible often defines words for us, like *faith*. You may know that there is a whole chapter given over to *faith*, Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11:1, it gives us a definition, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In Hebrews 11:6, it says, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Romans 12:3 tell us to every man is given “a measure of faith.” Romans 10:17 tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” This is a great word—this idea of *faith*.

Notice how quick the apostle Paul says this. In verse 8, he discusses that there is this gift of “grace you are saved through faith.” But then very quickly, he says, “and that not of yourselves.” He wants you to know—yes, you are saved, but it does not have anything to do with your goodness. I will never forget this. I saw it. I witnessed it one time. I saw a man kind of stroll down the aisle one time thinking he was going to give his heart to Christ. I do not really know why he was coming down, but I will tell you that the only way that we come to God is that the Spirit draws us. If we ever try to take any credit for coming to God, we have stolen from God that which is His. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17) You don’t come to God because one day you decided to. You come to God because you have been obedient to the call of the Holy Spirit. So very quickly, Paul says, “Oh, by the way. It is not on you.” Those are three great gospel words concerning the Christian’s future in Christ.

B. *Three Great Gospel Works*

I want us tonight to talk about not just three great gospel words but three great gospel works, if you will. Let’s read it beginning in Ephesians 2:9, “not from works, so that no one can boast.” Here is the bottom line. If you could do something to earn your salvation, then you would make God your debtor. If you were saved by being good, then conversely, you would be lost by being bad. It is just like the fact that you had nothing to do with being born into your family. When that sperm and that egg came together and you were created, it was something beyond you. What happens is God sends down His hand of grace, and we reach up our hand of faith, and the result is that we are saved. We cannot take any credit for it ourselves.

1. *The Workmanship of the Father*

But there are three great gospel works in verse 9, “not from works, so that no one can boast.” Look at verse 10, “For we are His creation.” It is a good word. It is the word *bara* (sp?). We are created *exnilo* (sp?), *out of nothing*. It is a very interesting word. “We are His creation.” Now, notice the next word, “For we are His creation—created.” Those are two different words. We are His creation, but then we are created for a purpose. That word *created* is interesting. It comes from the same word that we would use for the word *poem*. It is *poema*. I don’t know if you have ever written any poetry. There are different ways to do it. It does not always have to rhyme. There are some beautiful things about poetry. Most of the time when you write something yourself, it is something that you feel good about. It is your masterpiece. When God at His creation and He created us, we are His poem. We are the masterpiece. We are the highest creation of

everything that God has created. We see the first great work here is the workmanship of the Father. We are His masterpiece. Listen to what the Bible has to say in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands.” Every mountain, every hill, every plain, every ocean, every sea, waters, trees, rocks, sand, earth, all show forth God’s creation. But we are His masterpiece.

Yesterday, I saw some friends I had not seen in a while. I pulled out the phone, and I started scrolling through some pictures of the grandkids. Because that is just something I am proud of, and I wanted these folks to see these pictures. Imagine how God must feel as we are His children, created by Him, and we are His created masterpiece. We are His poem, if you will. That is the works of the Father.

2. The Works Produced by the Saints

There are also some works produced by the saints. Let’s read in Ephesians 2:9, “not from works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works.” The reason that we have been created is for good works. Have you ever known anyone who would say their faith is not a working faith? I would say that is an invalid faith. What about someone who says, “Well, I used to have faith, but I don’t have faith right now.” Someone has said it well, “A faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first.” That is not the kind of faith that I believe God wants us to have. In fact, it is what the writer of the book of James calls a dead faith. Faith without works is dead. I want you to get this word here. “It is God's gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast.” Look at verse 10, “For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God,” look at this word, “prepared ahead of time.” This is what is interesting. That word *prepared* is the same word that we see in Ephesians 1:5, “He predestined us.” Now here it is. Did God choose us? Yes! Did God predestine us? Yes! That is the same word that is in Ephesians 2:10, that we have been *predestined* for good works. God created you when you were dead and depraved and guilty, and then He lifted you and He gave you life and He redeemed you for the ordained purpose that you might exhibit good works. You are not doing something supernatural if you serve God. You are doing what is expected of you as a believer in Christ. We are predestined to produce good works.

Many of you have heard of the preacher of yesteryear, D.L. Moody. He said it like this, “Faith without works is like putting all your money into a foundation. Works without faith is like building a house on sand.” They are both big time trouble. We see the works produced by the Father and then the works produced by the saints.

3. The Work that God Does In Us and Through Us

There is also the work that God does in and through us. Let’s read it again. Ephesians 2:10, “For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.” We are God’s masterpiece. You know that everybody has a different temperament. Some people are more artsy than others. Have you have ever been around a fine musician? The people who are fine musicians, they don’t want to just slop through something. They don’t want to just get by. Someone who is a real artist wants to do it right. You know the difference between someone who knows all the chords and a real musician. A real artist, a real musician, or a real writer all desire to bring their works before others. We have been in homes, and a lot of times someone will show us some of their artwork. They are kind of proud of it. In the same way, God’s desire is for us to be saved and as His shining glory, as His masterpiece, that we might be a trophy of His grace. Our lives become emblematic of the grace and the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know where many diamonds are mined. They come from Africa, but the number one exporter of diamonds is Israel. I remember the first time I ever went to a diamond factory. It was in Amsterdam. We went to a diamond factory there for the first time. I had never been anyplace like that, and I was kind of excited to watch a *diamond in the rough*. What you would see is that a diamond in the rough is rough and somewhat ugly and unusable. Maybe you have heard about the Russell Conwell book *Acres of Diamonds*. This guy finds one of the biggest diamonds in the world, and he is using it to keep his door open. He didn't understand how valuable it was. Now listen, a rough and ugly diamond when put in the hands of a master diamond cutter, can be transformed into a tremendous thing of beauty and value. The same is true with us. We are diamonds in the rough before Christ, and we are living in guilt. When we come to Christ, we get His grace. In the future, we are going to behold His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of God. The way that we want to now begin to prepare what we are going to be in the future is begin to shine for our Lord Jesus Christ and allow His Holy Spirit to chisel off the rough edges of our lives and to polish us up that we might be brilliant, shining servants for Our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we might be the masterpiece for our Master. Let's stand for prayer.