

Theology of the Christian Life

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Date: 26 October 2013

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[0 : 00] I would like us this morning to turn with you to the letter of Paul to the Ephesians in chapter 2.

I'm reading at the beginning of the chapter. And you have ye quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, where in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, but his great love wherewith he has loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

By grace you are saved. And so on. I would like just by way of introduction to turn you to the Acts of the Apostles for a moment or two, to chapter 27, to an incident that is well known to us in the life of the Apostle Paul.

It seems to me to be a very important experience that the Apostle Paul had, or at least not only that, but the very statements that he makes there concerning the way that God was dealing with him.

[1 : 49] Because you remember the situation was the shipwreck, and the dangers that they were all under. Do you remember God came away with this announcement? Let me pray Paul came away with this announcement of verse 22.

He says, It's that statement that the Apostle Paul makes there, which is a statement that ought to ring in our own ears very strongly, because we are all called upon to be professors of the Lord Jesus Christ, to witness and to testify.

It doesn't matter the circumstance of our life. The Lord Jesus is calling us to witness and to testify. And here the Apostle makes this one great testimony.

I believe God. It's a very sinful statement, and yet it's full of profundity, and it's full of experience as far as the Apostle Paul is concerned.

When he was writing this letter to the Ephesians, he knew that there were many issues within the Ephesian church, and many issues between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, between Jew and between Gentile, but those who would come together in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 32] Whatever problems there were, what the Apostle Paul seems to me to suggest to them, with regard to their faith that they now have in the Lord Jesus Christ, that that faith must be presented to the world.

It has to be presented. We're not called upon to hide our light under our bushel. We're not called upon to create divisions and think of ourselves above what we ought to think.

We're not called upon to have this idea that someone of us is better than anybody else. But we're called upon to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that's no mean feat. And when you understand what Jesus is anticipating and expecting of each and every one of us, you then begin to question, maybe at times, how deep is your faith? How deep is its exercise? How extensive is it? Do you have the witness and the testimony of the woman of Samaria? Can you go into the world and say to this world, come see a man that told me all things that ever I did.

[4 : 39] Is not this the Christ? Is that our testimony? Are we afraid? Are we hiding? Do we feel that at times maybe we do not have the ability to do the things that Jesus is anticipating of us?

Is it because maybe at times we are not fully trusting in the Lord Jesus as we should? And I want us just for a few moments this morning to look at some things that the Apostle Paul draws our attention to because it is the basis, after all, of all that we are in Christ Jesus, this side of eternity.

And if there is trouble in our hearts, if there is anxiety, remember what we have to do is always return to the word and to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and what it says about us. We can look into our lives, yes, negatively. I would hope that during the last few days in self-examination and repenting that we weren't doing it in some kind of negative way but in a positive way, believing and trusting and that that trust is increasing day by day in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul made that announcement to these men on that ship, I believe God, he was testifying there to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ, everything about his life was under the compass and it was under the eye of God.

[6 : 19] And he knew that he was a very privileged man, a man who received grace undeservedly and mercy. After all, we know what kind of man he was before Jesus had met him on the road to Damascus.

We know that he was a self-righteous man. We know that he was a religious bigot. But Jesus changed that. He is a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Old things are passed away. Old things are become new. I want to ask you, ask of yourself, what do you really think of your relationship between yourself and the Lord Jesus Christ as you anticipate responding to Jesus' invitation to come and to remember his death?

Is there something in the way? Is there unbelief? Is there a suggestion that the Lord Jesus is not enough for you?

Well, Paul gives us tremendous hints here. Because one of the things that we've got to remember that if as people following the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that the Lord Jesus has dealt with us and dealt with our sins, we take what the apostle says here to these Ephesians, whatever their background might have been, whether they were Jews, whether they were Jews converted to Christ, or whether they were Diana worshippers, whatever their background, they were now a different people.

[7 : 57] And that's what Paul is emphasizing. The fact is this, that you are no longer what you once were. And that in itself is a huge miracle.

As you sit here preparing to take the bread and the wine tomorrow, what are you thinking? With regard to your relationship to him? Is it not the case, truly, that you are different to what you once were?

The graphical expression that the apostle Paul uses throughout the whole of this passage tells us very succinctly, albeit sometimes the language is sometimes difficult to follow, nevertheless the principles that he brings out before us, ought to give encouragement to those of us who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet at the same time are very conscious of our own weakness and our frailty.

But let not our weaknesses and our frailties undermine the ability of Christ to do for us above even what we are able to ask or even think because he is able.

And Paul knew it. In the middle of that situation with such unbelief and godlessness around him on that ship, he could stand up there and say, I believe God.

[9 : 24] Why? Because he has dealt so graciously and bountifully with me. He says to these Christians at Ephesus, he says, you, he says, you who he has quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins in time past.

He says, this is past, what is gone before. Three times in this passage he talks about the past. He draws their attention to that not in order to put them down or to suppress them or to make them feel bad about themselves, but he wants to highlight to them the work of grace that has gone on in their life.

Superior experience. No man or woman in this world has ever experienced the outpouring of the love of God, the mercy and the grace of God like you or I.

I'm not trying to be presumptuous and say anything that we ought not to say, but surely it is true of what the word of God is saying to us here. A difference has been accomplished.

A difference has been made. A new creation has resulted in the activity of the Spirit of God. We who were no different in terms of condemnation to these people.

[10 : 42] No different. Oh, you and I may have had a background of Christianity and that was our privilege, but for many, a year maybe, we lived in this world, in the darkness of this world, having, as it were, abrogated our responsibilities to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, one day, as was the experience of Saul of Tarshish, the Lord Jesus met us. And what did he say? What has he said to each and every one of us?

What has he done? He has delivered us. He has set us free. You can imagine what it must have been in the experience of that man, Saul of Tarshish, the day that Jesus spoke to him.

And yes, maybe there are people here who would love to say, I wish I had something of that kind of conversion that Saul had. Maybe then my faith might be stronger.

Maybe then I might be more attuned to Christ. Let me tell you something. You don't have to have that particular experience of Paul, but just to know this one thing.

[11 : 56] Once you were blind, now you see. Once you were, like these Ephesians, you may not have worshipped an idol, you may not have worshipped Diana of the Ephesians, but nevertheless, you were in darkness, you were in unbelief.

How does he put it here? He says this, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.

Very uncomfortable words. Maybe we don't like them. Maybe it is the case that we think that really we're not all that bad at all, or we weren't really all that bad.

The miracle of redemption is something that you and I must never lose sight of. That the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed me, a sinner deserving of hell.

I often think, and maybe I've said this before to some of you, I often think in that great passage in John 3.16, you know, when we are told the great gospel message, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[13 : 19] But the writer goes on because he says, for God sent not his Son into this world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

The reality was, and is, for those who are outside of Christ, we were already under that condemnation. Jesus didn't need to come into this world to condemn us.

We were already condemned. What Jesus' plan and purpose was, was to redeem. To redeem a lost soul to himself, and to make a change, and to make a difference.

And it is only Christ that could ever have done it. And again, as I say, and I reiterate, as you sit here, knowing that you are going to come to the table, whatever feelings you may have, whatever worries and concerns you might have of that very act, remember, you don't go in the strength of Christ.

You go in the strength of yourself, but in the strength of Christ, the one whose power delivered you and redeemed you from that state of condemnation, that state of wrath.

[14 : 29] You were not what you once were. Of course, that does not give us a pill to lie on, but to make us to think that, well, everything is all right.

There might be that kind of easy-believersism that is rampant in some parts of the church, that once you are saved, then you can do what you like. The Apostle Paul was very conscious of this thing, that although he was not what he once was, he knew fine within his own experience, as every one of us does, that we are not what we should be.

None of us here, I'm sure, as you are waiting to take the bread and the wine, that you're going to do so, thinking yourself to be something that you're maybe not.

You know that you have sin within you. You know that there are things about you that are an offence to Christ. To whom do we turn?

As Peter says, thou is the words of eternal life. When the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are not what we once were, he knows only too well that he is not what he should be, and he reiterates this, that he not, when he was writing to the church at Rome, in that great and familiar passage in Romans chapter 7.

[15 : 59] When he looks at himself, he sees himself, not in a negative way, but he knows fine that he is not always what he should be.

O wretched man that I am, he says, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? How did he put it? The good that I would, I do not.

The evil that I would not, that do I. O wretched man that I am. Yes, we have that appreciation of ourselves.

But we know that by the grace of God, as Paul uses this but here, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love, wherewith he has loved us, even when we were dead and sins hath quickened us together with Christ.

None of us here can say that we have attained what we should have done. In fact, when Paul was writing to the Philippians, does he not draw our attention to that very thing in chapter 4?

[17:13] This is what he says. Maybe I'll read of verse 9. And be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, which is of God, by faith, that I might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

The apostle Paul wants to be like Christ. He knew fine that the life that he once lived was a life far distant from God, and he was deserving of God's judgment, but now he is a new creation. But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't leave it as a conversion experience. He wants to press on. He wants to experience more and more of the person of Christ in his life.

This is what he says. if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead, not as though I'd already attained, or were already perfect.

There's a lot of work to be done. There's a lot of sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God to be done. We're not there yet.

[18:32] But that should not cause us concern or to be disconcerted, but rather, as the Apostle says here, to press on. Keep on going, he says.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do for getting those things which are behind and reaching forth. This is no mere dilatory Christian experience.

This is a man who has set out to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and everything about his life is a desire towards him. Whatever his desires were before, and they are in total contrast to what they are now, when you think of what he was desiring to destroy the church of Christ, what a miracle of redemptive love has been wrought in this man's life.

And he knows he is a miracle, but he doesn't make any assumption. He knows fine. He must keep on.

He must keep on going, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

[19:56] And then he says, let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be this minded. And if in anything you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Oh yes, friends, we know that we are a new creation. A difference has taken place. There is a love in our heart that was never there before until the Lord Jesus Christ stepped in and redeemed and set the seal of his love upon us.

And it is because of that that is this urgency in our spirit. What for? To be like Christ.

To be like Christ. Paul had a desire in his heart, yes. He wanted to be with Christ. that this side of eternity, what he wanted more than anything else, was to be like Christ.

His life was so wasted prior. And I would think that every Lord's Day and especially every communion season is a time in which we would reflect on that very thing.

[21:14] How much do I want to be like Christ? Christ? Do you remember what Jesus says in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel?

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth and so on.

Each one of these beatitudes bespeak surely to they not an increasing desire for the Lord Jesus Christ not just to be part of our life but to be everything.

He is my all and in all. Is that what we can testify? That's what we will be doing tomorrow as we sit at this table and again as I said not presumptuously but believing that all that we have and all that we are is because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I said we are not what we should be nor are we what we could be. There could be much more improvement in us. But what about what we will be?

[22:33] Is that not important to us? Well after all again the coming to the Lord's table is a reminder to us not only that Jesus died but he says to us do this in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do show forth the Lord's death till when?

Till the next communion? Till he comes and he is coming. don't ever let the evil one think make you think that he's not coming or he's delayed his coming because if you think like that then what will happen is that you will get lukewarm and you will maybe find yourself under the expression that was given against the church at Laodicea.

what Paul is saying here we have something a great inheritance before us and that's what he is looking to is he not saying not that he has already attained anything or was already perfect but he's pressing on because he knows that the Lord Jesus is going to come and he will receive him unto himself but that was the promise that was the prayer of Jesus I will that those whom thou has given me be with me where I am does that not focus your mind and mine is our attention not focusing upon the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ because surely that is what motivates us so strongly it's what gives us purpose in life that he is coming and more than that when he does come as John says and as Paul says in

Philippians we shall be like him that again is amazing from our standpoint we may say how can these things be how can I ever be like Christ yes we can be full of doubts full of unease nevertheless the truth is that one day we shall be like him so the work of grace that has been wrought in our hearts as the apostle Paul would suggest to us and as he says in that passage a great passage in Corinthians does he not where he talks about grace as he does here of course but what does he say but by the grace of God I am what I am 1 Corinthians and verse 15 verse 10 by the grace of

God I am what I am we're not what we once were and again I don't say we don't take that presumptuously and we know too within our own hearts and souls that we are not what Christ would want us to be he is constantly going to exhort us about the way that we live he did that to the disciples on numerous occasions and Paul teaching the Ephesians or any one of the epistles that he wrote to these various churches where he has to exhort them to obedience to unity of spirit and purpose Paul says here by grace you are saved through faith that not of yourselves it is the gift of God what a gift what do we do with it well what we do with it is what we are going to do tomorrow we are going to remember his death and again under his strength we will do that and we are going to say are we not as with the apostle

[26 : 57] Paul that at that time we were without Christ being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world but now that but is so important that's the mark that's the dividing line before between the old and the new old things are passed away everything has become new why because the blood of Jesus Christ God's son cleanses us from all sin when we are reminded of the blood of Jesus there are numerous things that draw our attention to that blood and one of the things I think that is so much important to us and that is knowing that as I said a while ago about the condemnation that we were all under outside of

Christ what the blood of Jesus Christ does it averts does it not the judgment that we were deserving of we are washed we are made clean we might say how is this possible we may not understand it fully but let's by faith believe in the blood that shed for the remission of sin I hope and pray that throughout this weekend you will know the Lord's blessing and whatever intrepidations you may have about coming to the table cast them aside put your trust not in your work but put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ if you are a soul here this morning concerned maybe anxious about eternity maybe the word of

God has reached into that heart of yours and is calling you to repent and to believe to believe in the blood of the everlasting covenant if you are someone who is following maybe afar off ask God to give you the strength to profess that there is none likened to Jesus no not one because I can assure you from what the apostle says in this whole chapter and there is a theology here of the whole of the Christian life and what he is saying here to every single one of us there is nothing that can beat the power of the gospel the sweetness and the fragrance of the gospel there is nothing that can make such a difference in the life of humanity unless to get down to ourselves in your life than mine than the gospel of

Jesus Christ everything else will disappear everything else is but froth if you are real concerning the Lord Jesus Christ then give up the tenacious hold that you might have upon this world and flee to the Lord Jesus Christ shall we pray have to say of