

Ephesians 2B

- We're moving through some of the most important doctrine in all the New Testament
 - And when we started this journey a couple of months ago, I warned that we would be challenged at times by what we learned
 - After all, you can't wade into matters like predestination or election without feeling challenged
 - And the reason these things are so challenging is because what the Bible teaches about spiritual matters is often different than what we experienced personally
 - For example, we remember choosing to place our faith in Jesus at a certain moment in our life
 - But we learned in Chapter 1 that the Father chose us for salvation from before the world began
 - And perhaps we remember doing good works for other people before we became a Christian, thinking God would be pleased by them
 - But we learned at the beginning of Chapter 2 that our good works were merely selfish products of a sinful heart so they could not please the Lord
 - That's why we have to study scripture, because through His word God reveals truths to us that we never could have discovered on our own
- Last week we discovered another of these world-rocking truths
 - We learned that prior to faith, we were dead in our trespasses and sins
 - We dead in the sense that we were under judgment for our transgressions
 - But more than that, Paul said we were incapable of doing anything spiritually good, including seeking for God
 - We were like a corpse...absent spiritual life and so incapacitated by our condition so that we could do nothing to correct our problem

- Paul's been explaining how we're on a spiritual journey that follows in Jesus' footsteps
 - Like Jesus, our spiritual journey begins with a death
 - But in our case, Paul says we were born "dead" in keeping with the way everyone enters the world
 - Then Paul added in v.3 that this "dead" nature also dictated our behavior

Eph. 2:3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

- Paul said that we too were formerly like the world is still today
 - We were once unbelievers and lived as they do
 - It's important to remember where we began in our journey as Christians
 - We never want to begin thinking we have always been saved
 - As if we had no need for God's grace in the first place
 - In other words, no one is born a Christian
 - Even when someone sprinkles water on a baby's forehead and calls it a baptism, that child is not magically made a Christian
 - To be born again spiritually requires the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person to give that person a new spirit
 - As God Himself describes, speaking of how the New Covenant comes to a person

Ezek. 11:19 "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

Ezek. 11:20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

- That moment of salvation comes only as a result of a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the scripture says

- Until that moment came for us, we were as dead as the rest of the unsaved world
- Then Paul says in v.3 that as a result of our dead condition, we acted in accordance with our nature
 - Now our “dead” nature was given to us at birth
 - We inherited it, which is why Paul calls us children of wrath
 - Adam brought God’s wrath upon humanity, and his condition has been passed down to every generation since
 - The Bible teaches that a person’s nature controls a person’s actions and thoughts
 - You could think of a person’s spiritual nature like their computer software
 - Our nature was hardcoded into us like software in a computer at birth, and it determines how we think and live
- At the moment Adam disobeyed the word of God in the Garden and sinned, his nature changed
 - Before the fall, Adam’s nature was programmed by God and was innocent and without rebellion or sin
 - But when he fell, we could say he was reprogrammed
 - His new “source code” was written by the devil himself
 - By Satan’s influence, the human race fell into sin and became like him, spiritually
 - That’s why scripture says unbelievers are children of the devil, because he is the father of fallen humanity
 - Therefore we share Satan’s condemnation, which is why Paul calls unbelievers children of wrath
 - From that point onward, Adam and all who descend from Adam act according to this new, sinful nature
 - That new programming directs the behavior of unbelievers, which leads to them obeying the lusts of the flesh

- Before we knew Christ, we too “indulged” the desires of our flesh, allowing them to dictate our thinking and acting
- We submitted to the base impulses of our nature routinely and without forethought
- We fell to the temptations of the enemy without even knowing he existed
- That’s what a fallen, sinful nature produces automatically
- If you think back to your life prior to Christ, I doubt you perceived yourself to be a bad person – much less a person controlled by the devil
 - But that’s not surprising...because our human experience can’t prepare us to understand the spiritual realities of our condition
 - Simply put, spiritually dead people can’t know spiritual truths
 - As unbelievers, we had no idea how far we were from God nor how to find Him
 - An unbeliever’s nature blinds them to their own condition
 - It would be like trying to explain to a fish what it means to be “wet”
 - The fish is completely wet all the time, so we might assume it would understand its own condition
 - But because it’s never *not* been wet, it has no way to appreciate what being wet means
 - Similarly, an unbeliever can’t understand what it means to be spiritually dead or to need to be born again, because such insight requires being spiritually alive first
 - As Paul said

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Only those who are spiritually alive can understand spiritual truth

- Yet as long as a person is spiritually dead, they cannot accept spiritual truths, Paul says
- So we find a Catch-22:
 - The Gospel message is spiritual truth which is the only way someone may be born again spiritually
 - But unbelievers are dead spiritually and therefore they cannot receive spiritual truth
 - Only those who are already spiritually alive can understand spiritual truth
 - So how can a spiritually dead person receive the Gospel so as to be saved if they must be spiritually alive first in order to accept it?
- Now you see why Isaiah said that even the “good works” of an unbeliever are filthy garments to God
 - An unbeliever’s nature prevents them from knowing and obeying spiritual truth
 - Even worse, unbelievers are incapable of finding their way out of their own dilemma
 - So without faith, it’s impossible to please God
- Yet that was our “former” life, before we had faith in Jesus Christ
 - But how exactly did we move from death to life in Christ?
 - We know that all humanity enters the world dead in trespasses and sins, so how did we overcome that barrier and accept the Gospel?
 - How did we gain the ability to receive spiritual truth so as to be saved?
 - Somehow, we left our state of spiritual deadness and became alive spiritually so we could accept Christ in faith
 - And Paul says that power was not our own
 - Just as the Father raised Christ from the grave, we likewise had to be raised spiritually before we could come to faith

- Paul explains how that happened in the next part of Chapter 2

[Eph. 2:4](#) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [Eph. 2:5](#) even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [Eph. 2:6](#) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [Eph. 2:7](#) so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- Paul explains how we moved from death to life, that is how we came to having faith in the Gospel even though we were spiritually dead
 - Since we didn't possess the power to respond to spiritual truth, Paul says our salvation once again began with God (v.4)
 - Paul says God *made* us alive together with Christ
 - The phrase "made us alive together with" is a single Greek word
 - It occurs only one other time in the New Testament in Colossians, where Paul uses it to describe the same concept

[Col. 2:13](#) When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, [Col. 2:14](#) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

- In both cases, Paul emphasizes that our coming to life spiritually in Christ was something God made happen
 - We did nothing to prompt God to take this step
 - We didn't ask for it, and we certainly didn't initiate it
 - God did it all
- And in fact, the Father planned it long ago
 - Paul says He placed our personal debt of sin on Christ even as Christ hung on the cross
 - This demonstrates that the Lord was already preparing for our salvation long before we were ever born

- And furthermore, Paul adds both in Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2 that we were made alive while we were dead in our transgressions
 - While we were like a corpse, spiritually speaking
 - Like a dead man, we had zero potential to respond to the Gospel
 - God made us alive without our involvement because we were unable to respond
- Think back to the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of John
 - In the instant before Jesus called Lazarus to rise and come forth from the tomb, Lazarus was a corpse, dead three days
 - If you remember, Jesus didn't ask Lazarus if he wanted to be raised
 - And even if Jesus had issued Lazarus such an invitation, Lazarus couldn't have responded
 - He was incapable of responding because he was dead
 - Dead things know nothing, hear nothing, agree to nothing
 - The only way Lazarus was walking out of that tomb was if God made him alive
 - Only then could Lazarus respond to Jesus' order to come forth
 - And so it was for us spiritually
 - When the time came for our salvation, in an instant the Lord made us alive
 - By His Spirit, we were born again as Jesus says in John 3
 - Then once we were alive, we responded to the call of the Gospel, we believed and we professed Christ
 - Notice that Paul adds at the end of v.5 that this is the technical definition of grace
 - The biblical definition of grace is God making us alive while we were dead and unable to do anything to help ourselves
 - Grace is *not* merely an offer or an invitation to be saved
 - Dead people do not accept spiritual invitations

- Grace was God acting on His own to save us
- And more than just saving us, the Father has made us to share in everything He granted to Christ
 - Paul says in v.6 that we were raised to sit with Christ at the right hand of the Father in heavenly places
 - Obviously, you and I haven't traveled into Heaven as yet
 - So we know Paul was speaking spiritually
 - He's saying we've been granted a spiritual version of what Christ Himself received at His ascension
 - In the Bible, to sit implies to have finished working
 - So Christ sat because His work of redemption was complete
 - And spiritually, we too have been seated with Christ, because we don't work for our salvation either
 - The Lord did all the work, including making us alive so that we could receive the Gospel
 - Which means we will also share in Christ's inheritance
 - In ages to come, Paul says the constant refrain of God's children will be praises for His kindness toward us
 - The more we understand about what God did for us, the more those praises will grow
 - If you praised Him when you thought you chose Christ, how much more do you praise Him now that you know He chose you?
- Perhaps you're surprised to learn that God made you alive so you could receive the Gospel, because that doesn't seem to agree with our personal experience
 - Our personal experiences in coming to Christ appear to be the result of our decision to believe
 - We didn't detect a moment of being born again before we professed Christ
 - We didn't perceive the Spirit's arrival into our hearts

- We simply heard or read the Gospel, and it seemed sensible to us and so we agreed with it
- That was our experience...but it turns out our experience wasn't the whole story
- That's why I said earlier we have the word of God to explain spiritual truths that can't be understood merely through human experience
 - Our experience in coming to faith simply doesn't prepare us for understanding *how* it actually happened
 - The Bible teaches that we heard the Gospel because the Father opened our ears
 - And the Bible says we agreed with the Gospel because the Spirit gave us the ability to accept spiritual truth
 - And the Bible says we confessed Christ because God gave us a new nature programmed to accept the things of God
 - Our personal salvation moment was just the last step in a long chain of events that God initiated for our sake long before we knew Him
- So why did the Father do these things for us?
 - Paul says in .v4 because He is rich in mercy
 - Being rich means having an excess of something
 - Your rich uncle has an excess of money
 - Or we say a dessert is rich because it has an excess of sweetness
 - Bring rich means having plenty to spare
 - Likewise, the Lord showed us an excess of mercy
 - It was more mercy than we had right to expect or deserved
 - We had every reason to remain dead and rightly under condemnation for our transgressions
 - Adam placed humanity in that condition, and the Lord was under no obligation to correct the situation

- But the Father being rich in mercy chose to save us
 - As Paul says, He did this purely because of His great love for us
 - He didn't extend us mercy because of something we said or did
 - It certainly wasn't because we earned His mercy through our good works
- As we learned earlier, we didn't have any good works to offer Him
 - No, the truth is we were spiritually dead, we were unable to please God, and we deserved nothing
 - We stand here today saved only because God loved us
- Remember I said we're walking the same path that Christ walked on our behalf
 - He shared in death because we were already dead and in need of salvation
 - Then Christ was made alive so that He might blaze a path for us to follow
 - And in the same way, we move from death to life also by the Father's might
 - Paul says in v.6 that the Father had you in mind even as He raised Christ
 - We were "in Christ" spiritually at the moment the Father raised Christ from the dead
 - The Father had us in mind as He acted to raise Christ, so that in a day to come He would do the same for us
 - Now we can have a life like Christ in every respect
 - We possess a new nature, a living spirit that has been reprogrammed to hear the Spirit and obey His voice
 - The problem is we still have a flesh that obeys Satan's programming, so we must battle it if we want to please God
- If you've walked with Christ for a time, then you probably have noticed how your new spirit has produced positive changes in your life
 - Do you notice that you think differently and act differently?
 - Do you notice that you feel differently about sinning?

- You still do it, of course, but you desire it less, right?
- And when you do succumb to sin, it doesn't feel as rewarding as it once did, does it?
- Moreover, did you gain a new desire for God's word, for knowing Him and hearing Him?
 - Weren't you drawn into a life with God's people
 - Have you become aware of your bright spiritual future and does that future excite you?
 - If so, then you can see by all these things how you are now spiritually alive and growing in respect to spiritual truth
- On the other hand, maybe some of these things have yet to happen for you or they hold little interest for you
 - That's not unexpected, because Christians move down the path of sanctification to varying degrees and at their own pace
 - Some move farther and faster than others
 - But if you're not moving at all, then take a second look at how you're walking with Christ
 - Sanctification is always a matter of obeying the Spirit
 - We must daily take up our cross, so to speak, so we may crucify the desires of our flesh while strengthening our spirit through spiritual disciplines
- I should add that in some rare cases, a person's complete lack of interest in spiritual truths *may* mean he or she has yet to be born again spiritually
 - In such a case, a person would be claiming to be Christian without even knowing what it truly means to be in Christ
 - But I want to caution us against jumping to that conclusion in the case of someone we know who may have a very shallow walk with the Lord
 - Behavior and attitudes are messy things, and therefore they are an imperfect guide to assessing a person's heart
- We'll end today with Paul's own summary

[Eph. 2:8](#) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

[Eph. 2:9](#) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Paul summarizes his argument with one of the most powerful statements in all his letters
 - To understand these verses properly, we need to take them apart grammatically
 - First, Paul says we were saved by grace
 - Sometimes you may hear someone say that Christians are saved by faith, but this is not correct
 - We are saved by grace
 - This point is important because it completely changes the location of action
 - If we say we are saved by faith, then the location of the action is inside us
 - The believer is the one who has faith and if having faith produces salvation, then we could say we saved ourselves
 - We would be saying that at the moment we took the step of believing, then we brought salvation to ourself
 - But Paul makes clear this is not correct
 - Rather salvation is by grace, and grace comes from God
 - God gives grace to us, and by His grace He made us alive while we were dead
 - By grace He predestined us to receive salvation
 - By grace we were saved
- But how does God show His children that He has bestowed His grace upon them?
 - Imagine if God had determined to save us but never told us about it
 - Only when we came into His presence following our death would we know that we had been given grace

- How much better that He show His grace to us while we are on earth so that we can begin to praise Him even now
- So God manifests His grace to us *through* faith in Jesus Christ
 - Through our faith, God's grace becomes evident, both to us and to the world
 - We can see faith coming to someone, by which we know that person was saved by God's grace
 - Faith is still the essential requirement for salvation, but faith is the result of God's grace, not the way we gain God's grace
- And just to make sure we understand the relationship between grace and faith, Paul adds that the faith we possess is "not of yourselves"
 - Your saving faith in Jesus Christ did not originate inside you
 - Paul says at the end of v.8 that it is a gift of God
 - God gave you the faith that you have, so that you would show evidence of His grace
 - Some commentators claim the "gift" God gives cannot be faith
 - They argue that in the Greek text, the pronoun "it" is in the neuter voice, yet both the words grace and faith are feminine nouns
 - Therefore, they believe that "it" must refer to the entire preceding statement, meaning salvation itself is the gift
 - They are right, but they are cherry-picking in their interpretation
 - I agree that when Paul said "it" he was referring to the preceding clause
 - But let's look at all that we find in the preceding clause
 - We find not only salvation but also grace and faith
 - All these things are part of the gift God gives to bring us into righteousness
 - That's why Paul says "it" is not of yourself
 - Yes, the grace we received is from God

- And so is the salvation that God's grace produced
- But so is our faith which manifested God's grace
- All three are "not of yourselves," because together they are all the gift of God
- Because God did everything with respect to our salvation, Paul adds in v.9 that our salvation is not the result of works
 - Works refers to anything a human being can accomplish
 - For example, physical acts are works
 - Therefore, Paul says no physical act contributed to our salvation
 - This means walking down an aisle or kneeling or praying did not save us, for those are human works
 - Works also refers to anything a human being can say
 - We professed Christ when we were saved, but the speaking of those words didn't save us
 - Neither did a reciting of a confession of faith
 - If we hold that those things save a person, then we are saying a human work is partly responsible for salvation
 - But Paul says this is not true
 - And works even refers to our thoughts and emotions
 - Did you know that thoughts and emotions are works as well?
 - Do you remember when Jesus said that anger is equivalent to murder and lust is equivalent to adultery?
 - Jesus' statement establishes the principle that what we do in our thoughts is just as real as what we may do with our bodies
 - And our thoughts or feelings did not save us either
- Paul says that our salvation came apart from any human involvement whatsoever
 - Even the things we did do like believing and confessing were themselves the products of God's grace working in our hearts

- It was God Who produced faith in us causing us to confess
- So that when all is said and done, God's children will have no reason to boast in themselves
- We will by necessity give the Lord all credit for our salvation
- Paul's teaching unequivocally refutes every false teaching proposing that works are a way to reach Heaven
 - Religions such as Catholicism, Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Eastern pagan religions all teach that human achievements are required to enter Heaven
 - Paul says it is not so, for if it were, then men could boast concerning their salvation
 - We would be able to say we played a part in reaching Heaven
- But the Lord will have no such boasting, for how can dead people boast about becoming alive?
 - Could Lazarus boast that he raised himself from the dead?
 - Could he have said, "I heard the Lord's voice so I decided to sit up and walk out of the tomb?"
 - If Lazarus had dared to say this, wouldn't the onlookers have responded, "Yes Lazarus, but who caused you to come to life so that you could hear Jesus' call?"
 - To which the only answer would be "God made you alive so you could respond."
- And the same is true for you and me
 - We may say we were saved because we responded to the call of the Gospel and we believed
 - To which scripture asks, "Yes, but who caused you to come to life so you could hear Jesus' calling and obey it?"