

Renounce Sin; Receive Salvation

Sermon · Not stated

Let us begin by examining Salvation in brief. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4-9 thus: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

We are hardwired to think of things beginning and ending. The day starts and the day ends; the worship service begins and, eventually, if the preacher isn’t too long, the worship service ends. And death is ultimately viewed as that final end to human life, the end from which there is no coming back. That makes Paul’s statement at the very start of Ephesians 2 so startling. There he said, just prior to the passage I read to you, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked” (Ephesians 2:1-2a). Paul is telling us that before we had even started, everything had come to an end. We were dead before we had ever got a chance to live. His words echo David’s sentiment in Psalm 51, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” From the very start, we have no inclination of the mind-bending concept of eternal life because we are already dead in sin.

Paul described God as being “rich in mercy,” that is, literally wealthy with mercy and pity. Some wealthy people might have a bank account with a lot of numbers in the balance; God has a repository overflowing with compassion for people trapped in sin. Money generally does little good if it just sits in a bank. You have to spend it, either on yourself or someone else, to really have any benefit. And that’s exactly what God did with this over-abundance of mercy. He spent it. He spent it on us. And what did He buy with His mercy? Our lives. The great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved. That great love brought us life from death. Our sins had meant that we were forever lost; in Christ, we are forever found in the arms of our loving, merciful God. And all of that is done by grace, by the undeserved love that God had for us. We did not earn it; we did not deserve it. We were dead! But God raised us up with Christ Jesus.

One may wonder, since Jesus redeemed us with His precious blood and Salvation is only through grace, what it is that God expects us to do in our saved lives. Why are we not in Heaven yet? Our transition from death to life through the atoning death of Christ on the Cross releases us from the curse of eternal death. Beyond that, we live a life which eventually will transit into an ethereal life in the Kingdom of Jesus. But that will become a reality only if we place our faith in Jesus. Jesus knows that we cannot do that on our own, so He sent His Spirit to indwell in us. The Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, can reside in a heart which is sanctified. Sin and the Holy Spirit cannot co-exist. We need to make room for the Spirit in our hearts by purging sin out forever. Temptation comes, knocking on the door of our flesh like an old lover. We open the door a crack, and we are done for. And in a moment of insanity, our self-control disappears like a dream, and with that would vanish our Salvation.

God knows. He knows that our temptations awaken something fierce within us. When Christ describes self-control, He doesn’t downplay the agony of it. As Paul writes to Titus, self-control means “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12, King James Version; some other translations render this “renounce,” the word used in this sermon’s own title). The word behind it is a severe one—from the same Greek word-family Jesus uses when He says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). When we renounce ungodliness, we take something once precious to us and put it to death.

When the grace of God appears, He does not merely lift a calm hand and pronounce forgiveness over our sins and unfaithfulness. Grace rolls up its sleeves and starts to fight. Grace hunts down every graceless enemy of our souls. Or, as Paul puts it, grace takes us by the hand and begins to train us to say “no” to sin (Titus 2:11-12).

What is required of us is to possess a receptive heart—a heart prepared with the knowledge of

God the Son, Jesus Christ, a heart that is ready to say “no” to temptation when it comes knocking. The effort has to begin with us before it is too late. That is when Jesus takes control of our lives, and we see the path to Salvation clearly before us. Amen.