

**“BUT GOD . . .”**

Ephesians 2:4-8

**Intro:** We continually are hearing great things about people, great claims about what man can do. We are told that we can do anything if we just set our minds on doing it. And it is true that great things have been accomplished by men, women, young people, and even children. Every once in a while a child prodigy will come along who will attract the attention of the whole world by his or her ability in some area. The Bible teaches us that man was made in the image of God, but most of the claims that are made for the greatness of man do not take that into consideration. Man, and I use this word in a generic sense, is certainly, by virtue of the fact that he was made in the image and likeness of God, is the greatest of all creatures.

However, that is not the way that a great majority of people feel about God. Evolution has crowded out creation in most of our schools from the earliest grades to the universities of our country, and of the world. So that man takes credit for himself, and there is the belief with many that there is no limit to what man will eventually be able to do.

Most of you are familiar with these ideas of man because we hear these things, and much more, when men comment on man, and what he is actually capable of doing. However, the Bible gives us a much different picture of man. We had a glimpse of that last Sunday when we considered the first three verses of Ephesians 2. It is true that man was made in the image and likeness of God, but soon afterwards (we don't know how long it was, but it probably was not very long), we learn that the first man and the first woman, did something that has affected the whole human race. What they did in the Bible is called sin. What they did was to disobey God. They did what God told them not to do. And the result of what they did has fallen upon the whole human race. Paul described the human race as “children of disobedience” in verse 2 of Ephesians 2, and he called the human race as “children of wrath” in the third verse. He put himself in this category, and he did the same concerning everyone else. There has never been an exception to this except for the Lord Jesus Christ Whose birth many people throughout the whole world will soon remember.

Paul, writing under the direction of the Spirit of God here in the epistle to the Ephesians said that they and everyone else are “dead in trespasses and

sins.” That is, because of our sinful nature we are incapable of fellowship with God and are content to live without knowing God. He said that we by nature are under the dominion and control of the Devil. Consequently, by nature we live the way we do, according the lusts of our flesh, doing what we want to do regardless of what that is, and that we are under the judgment of God. Sin has made us blind to our own condition. Sin has made us proud and made us feel that we are gods as far as who we are and what we are capable of doing.

Now because sin has blinded us to our true condition, and the condition of the world, we can't see, we don't understand, that watching human nature and observing what is going on in the world every day, is proof that the Bible is true. Morally and spiritually the human race is under the judgment of God, and there is nothing that any man can do to change his condition, nor to make right his relationship to God. Actually, until the Lord opens our eyes to understand what is wrong, we are content to go on in our blindness, dead to God and the things of God, facing the eternal judgment of God.

If you can say this morning that Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 3, describes you as you are by nature, it is evidence that God has opened the eyes of your heart to understand what most of the world does not know. Paul said it was descriptive of him as he used to be. He found that mere religion was not enough. He needed an inward change. But before that he needed to find out how he could have a right relationship with God because of the many ways he had sinned before he became a Christian. God created us for His glory, but the Bible tells us that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Every person in every nation from the beginning of time has been affected by this deadly moral disease, and is going to die physically, and will experience eternal death as a judgment from God if a remedy is not to be found.

So, Ephesians 2:1-3 is one of the many times in the Bible that God has given us a word picture of exactly what we are by nature. This human race of which we all are a part, is in big, big trouble. What if this were all that the Bible could tell us about ourselves? What if this were all that the Bible could tell you about you? Where can we find an answer? Is there any hope for us anywhere?

Yes, there is! And that is why I want to call your attention to the two first words of verse 4, the words, “But God . . .”

## I. “BUT GOD . . .”

One thing that people universally do when they become convicted that they are sinners and under the judgment of God, is to try to do something that will make God pleased with them. And so they try to do good works. Or they try to quit doing things they know are displeasing to God. Or they join a church, or get involved in something religious.

The man who wrote this epistle that we are studying was a Jew. Not only that but he was a Pharisee. He surpassed most of his contemporaries in his zeal for God, but a big part of what he did was to try to do away with any many Christians as he could. But he said in one of his other epistles that what he was doing, he did “ignorantly in unbelief,” and what he actually learned was that with all of his religion he was by his own confession, the chief of sinners. You will find more about his testimony in the first chapter of his first letter to Timothy.

When you find out that you are in trouble with God, God is probably the last one that you would look to for help. Isn't that true? But that is exactly where you have to look. There is no one else who can help you. So those two words, “But God,” have spelled the difference between heaven and hell for countless numbers of people. I couldn't make things right with God for myself. And there is nobody else I ever knew or ever heard about who could make things right with God for me. They were all in the same trouble with God that I was. But how amazing it is to learn that the very God Who has declared me to be under judgment, is the only God and He has declared that I am under His wrath, if the One Who has promised me and all other sinners forgiveness and eternal life.

Now most people have the wrong idea about God. They have the idea that God, if there is a God, is terrible, is One Who takes pleasure in seeing people suffer, and they don't want to have anything to do with Him. They are afraid of Him.

Now most people have the wrong idea about themselves, and those ideas can only be corrected by reading what the Bible has to say about us, so to get the correct idea about God, you need to read the Bible to find out what God is really like. He is a holy God. He is a righteous God. He is a God Who hates sin in any and every form. But when you are a sinner looking for help, look at what Paul had to say about God. So let's talk about God. Notice what Paul had to say after those words, “But God . . .”

## II. THE NATURE OF GOD (Eph. 2:4-5a).

This God Who hates sin and has placed all sinners under condemnation and judgment, is a God “Who is rich in mercy.” What is mercy? It tells us that God is a God of compassion, a God Who is infinitely kind, a God Who knows that sin does not produce happiness, but that it produces misery of all kinds. And that fact that He is “rich in mercy” means that His mercy can never be exhausted. God is an unchanging God, so His mercy is never depleted. Long ago the prophet Jeremiah who lived and worked with a sinful, disobedient people of Israel wrote, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22, 23). Just think: you and I could have died before we learned the truth about God, or we could have been born in situations where we had never seen a Bible, or heard the truth about God. But we are here even today listening to what the Bible tells us about God. And only those whom God intends to save will really listen to the truth about God. So if you have heard, or if you are hearing for the first time today, give thanks to God for His amazing mercy. God could have sent all of us to hell, but He didn’t do that.

But let us read on in our text: “For His great love wherewith He loved us” (keep on reading) “even when we were dead in sins.” If you love God this morning, remember that He loved you before you loved Him. In fact, the Apostle John wrote, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). He loved those of us who love Him even while we were still “dead in sins.” In fact, He loved the people who are saved before the foundation of the world. He loves us with an everlasting love, and that is why He draws us to Himself.

We ought to be amazed that the name “God” and the pronoun “us” can be used in the same sentence. Paul touched on this same theme in his letter to the church at Rome when he wrote:

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

Notice the words, “Christ died for us,” in our place, as our Substitute. He took our sins upon Himself because they were charged against Him by the

Father. We can't speak of the love of God without speaking of Christ, because it is in what happened to Christ that we see how great God's love was and is for us.

But then Paul spoke in our text of:

### III. THE WORK OF GOD (Eph. 2:5b-7).

As evidence of the extent of God's love for us, notice in verse 5 the prepositional phrase, "with Christ." In verse 6, "in Christ Jesus." In verse 7, "through Christ Jesus."

God's mercy and God's love cannot be rightly discussed without bringing the Lord Jesus Christ into the picture. You will always find people who agree to talk about God, but they don't want to talk about Christ. That is not possible. If you don't want to have anything to do with Christ, then you can't have anything to do with God. In 1 John 5:11 and 12 we read these words:

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

And the Lord Himself said as we read in John 5:22-23:

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

People object to the word Christmas. Why? Because it has in it the name of Christ. It is an indication of man's rebellion against God as well as against Christ. A lot of preachers tell their people about God, but not about Christ. When they do, they are not telling their people the truth about God. Paul thought he was serving God when he sought to arrest Christians, but he learned that you can't serve God without serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

But back to our text, what did Paul have to say about Christ and those of us who are trusting in Christ?

In verse 5 the word "quicken" means *to make alive*. To be "quicken together with Christ" means that when He was made alive, we were made

alive too. When He died, we died with Him and in Him. That is how much the death of Christ means to us. We will never have to die for our sins, although we should, but we won't because Christ died in our place and in God's sight we died in Him and with Him. We certainly do not deserve such a place, but Paul brings another Gospel word in here to remind us that it is by grace, the undeserved, the unmerited favor of God, that we are saved. We will learn more about "grace" when we get down to verse 8.

To confirm what it means that we have been quickened together with Christ, Paul added in verse 6 that God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In God's sight we have been exalted in Christ and are seated at the right hand of the Father, the place of honor and total acceptance, "in Christ Jesus. In Christ it is so certain that we will be in heaven with our Lord, that the Father looks upon us as already there.

Now I know that all of us have wondered what we are going to be doing and what will we be experiencing when we get to heaven. Well, verse 7 helps us at least in part to know what we will be doing. "That in the ages to come," one description of eternity, "He [that is, God] might show the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." What are "the exceeding riches of His grace"? That is the Gospel. To those of us who know the Lord even now it is amazing to us that the God would ever love us (we loathe ourselves because of our sins). And how we thank Him that through the Lord Jesus Christ we have peace with Him. But we are going to be learning all through eternity more about, not just of "the riches of His grace," but "the exceeding riches of His grace," that is, how far beyond our need the grace of God has gone in meeting our need before God. Everything about God and His grace has to be expressed in the superlative.

I confess to you that I don't really have the words to express what is in these verses. I can't fully explain them to my own satisfaction. There is no much more here than any of us can comprehend in this life. **But I believe it all!** And I hope you do too. We can enter into the truth of these verses, and know that the Lord didn't leave a single thing for us to do in order for us to have perfect and eternal acceptance with our holy God and heavenly Father. Remember Ephesian 1:3.

**Concl:** Now let me ask all of us a question, and I want you to answer this

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question in your heart for yourself. All of us were born into verses 1 through 3 of chapter 2. Most of us God has moved us out of verses 1-3 into verses 4 through 7. Dr. Mitchell used to say, “What about you, my friend?” If you are not in verses 4-7, you have to be in verses 1-3. If you are saved, you are still a sinner, but you are not under the judgment of God. You are a saved sinner. But if you are not saved, you are still under the judgment of God, and you desperately need Christ. I would be so happy this morning if all of us could leave this place today saying what Paul said about his salvation, “I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12b).

Closing verse: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).