

Ephesians 2:1-13 (Walter Potter) 139538

Gathering Up the Fragments, Chapter 16

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The Exceeding Riches of His Grace Ephesians 2:1-13

Outward position does not change what we are by nature. In our chapter we read of some that were far off, and some that were nigh; then we read of one thing that was needful for them both—to be reconciled to God. We "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." God is at work today and is working to accomplish the same results.

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Death, in Scripture, does not always mean the same thing. "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." This is spiritual death and spiritual life. Then a few verses farther on, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." John 5:28, 29. This is what we call physical, or literal, death. Thus we find different kinds of death are referred to in Scripture.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." God connects these two things: sin and death. They go together, in the ways of God. And when the man opened the gate and let sin in, he could not keep back death.

The simplest definition of death that I know of is, separation. At physical death the body is in one world and the spirit is in another. The dead one has gone into another world, into eternity, and his body is here. Death has caused the separation. We have that thought frequently in the Word of God.

The second death will never be done away with, while physical death will be done away with. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death"—the physical death. The second death will take place in "the lake of fire." It is called the second death because it is the eternal, unchangeable condition of all the lost. They are separated forever from God, and confined under His judgment. There is no end to it. People talk about literal fire, but that is not the point; eternal confinement is the point. Fire is the judgment of God.

Let us hope that you will never find yourself in the lake of fire. Part of the gracious work of God in this day is saving souls—those who if left to go on in their own course, would find themselves, forever, not only excluded from the presence of God, but confined under His judgment.

There is another kind of death—"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." To be "dead in trespasses and sins" is separation from God by sins. That is not eternal death, however. Thank God, there is a remedy for it, and He is delivering people from it, and this is part of His work in this portion of Scripture.

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world." The course of this world is a system, under Satan as its prince, led on by him, and will end under judgment. When the Lord was in Gethsemane and the crowd came to take Him, He owned Satan as the prince of this world and said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Luke 22:53. People little think of who it is that is leading them on in their separation from God!

Into such a scene God comes, and works. What leads Him to work in it the 4th verse tells us: "But God, who is rich in mercy." Mercy leads God to work in this poor world, so estranged from Himself, and all pursuing a course that separates them from Him, and which must eventually, as was said, if not interrupted, end in His judgment upon them. How rich is God in mercy? We learn how rich as we learn what it is to be dead in trespasses and sins. By that I mean, we learn it in communion with God—what it was to be separated from Him, and what it is to be brought to Him. Our soul meditates on it with adoration.

His

great love wherewith He

loved us, even when we were dead in sins."

Are you dead in trespasses and sins, one whose sins have never been forgiven; whose sins still stand between you and God? If you are such and if you don't feel it, God does. He would have you know that He loves you, sinner as you are, "Even when we were dead in sins." In that connection another Scripture comes to mind: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8. Poor sinner, do you know where we who are His people, whose sins are forgiven, and whose sins no longer separate us from Him, first learned the truth that God loved us? We first learned it in His Son; in His sending His Son to die.

When we want to see what love is, we see it at the cross, where He has displayed it. Have you seen Christ die for your sins? For that is an individual thing. You say it for yourself; I say it for myself; all believers say it together, how that Christ died for our sins—"rich in mercy, for His great love."

The character of the life He has given us we have brought before us in different ways in Scripture, first in John 3:16 as "life eternal," and it is the opposite of perish. Here we have "quicken us together with Christ," and that little word of four letters—"with" means association. The life God has given to us as presented in this Scripture is life in association with Christ. It is that life that the blessed Saviour spoke of on the morning of His resurrection, when God had filled the heart and the lips of His Son with praise.

When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He rose with a song of triumph. Redemption's work was complete, and the Redeemer was in the glory of redemption. What was the first thing heard? "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." Again it is that character of life—life in association with Christ. How blessed and full it is! Ah, He had been at work, and God had been at work. He was led to work for those who were dead in trespasses and sins; and He brought them into the fulness of blessing. What fuller blessing can there be than to be in association with Christ? And, thank God, that is an association that will never be broken. It will always be true—"My Father, and your Father."

Now turn aside for a moment. What is meant by the church of God—the assembly of God? The Lord Jesus in glory will be surrounded with an innumerable company of redeemed ones, but amid that innumerable throng there will be one company in special nearness to Him and the special witness to the riches and glory of God's grace (Heb. 11:40; Eph. 1:5, 6; 2:7; 3:21). They are the object of His love, and He is the object of their love. This is the kind of association with that blessed Saviour which is the portion of the redeemed.

"Hath quickened us together with Christ"—who could do that? Ah, it is God, and the work of God. As Christians, we own it to be His work. "We are His workmanship," just think of that! God has been at work, and His work is perfect. He has done the work of creation again. He has acted in creative power twice. Referring to Genesis 1, we see God as the creator God. Then we see the results of that creative power, that when all is completed He looks over it, and rejoices in the work of His own hands. He blessed the day He rested from the work of His own hands.

"In Christ Jesus" refers to the place the believer has in Christ. We often have that expression, "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," but I call your attention to the fact that it is seldom outside of the writings of the Apostle Paul, because he is the instrument through whom God brings out the truth of new creation. God began the new creation when He raised Christ from the dead. He did not begin the new creation until He was done with the old one. He was done with the old creation, if I may so say, after He tried every effort to make something out of it. The world has shut God up to do one thing with it; it has left Him no other course but to execute judgment. Even the sending of His Son failed to reconcile the world to Himself, and He had to give it up. He has given it up, long, long ago. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

God has a new center of gathering: His Son, lifted up. God began His work of new creation after this world had refused His last offer. It is so wonderfully brought out in Luke 20:13, "What shall I do? I will send My beloved Son." The sending of that Son was the last resource, for God had no other. What was the result? O, you all know. The character of man came out to the full, and the treatment accorded to the Son of man here in His love, brought out the awful fact that not only is man a sinner, and guilty before God, but that he is at enmity with Him. There stands that cross. When you look at it from man's side, God can say, "If you want to know what your heart is, look at that cross. That is My Son, and who put Him there? Wicked hands put Him there. Why did I send Him? I sent Him in love to you." That is where it ended, at God's last resource.

Do you know that God is not ruling this world now? What kind of a God would He be if He ruled this world and allowed such a state of things to exist, year after year, century after century? You ask, what is He doing? He is overruling. He is overruling the works of the ruler, i.e., the prince of this world, and His work is saving people out of this world before judgment comes upon it.

The blessed God is at work in this scene, not to rectify conditions, but to take a people out of it, and the Christian is one who has been taken out of it by God's grace, and is not of the world. God will go on with that work until one of these days He will bring it to a close. He is gathering a people for Christ, and fitting them for heaven. When they are in heaven through the blessed Saviour having come to call them unto Himself, then the way will have been cleared for judgment to take its course. It is the mercy of God that keeps back the judgment of this world, but judgment will come.

The course of this world will end in destruction. Dear friends, men are absorbed with what is present, what is seen; while that which is unseen and eternal has been neglected, but remember, we shall be a witness either to God's power to save, or to God's power to judge. Such, you and I must be.

God's gracious work is in taking poor sinners and associating them with Christ. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." What a wonderful thing the salvation of God is! Just think of that!—"if children, then heirs." If I am not a child of God, I am a child of wrath. But do you know that if I am a child of God, I am an heir of God? How do we know these things? Because God tells us, and the child of God believes Him and thanks Him for them. Relationship and heirship go together.

I say, for the benefit of the younger ones here, do you know that you can't have the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, and not have God as your Father?

God is acting now according to His own great love. That is why we have these words, "God . . . rich in mercy, for His great love." Then there is another thing: God is blessing poor sinners now as One who has purchased the right to bless. God has purchased the right to save and bless a sinner. Without having purchased that right, He never could have done it. Purchasing that right means my sins had to be atoned for, for they stood in the way; they were a barrier. He longed to bless, but His holiness and righteousness kept Him back. Now the barrier has been removed, and God knows of no hindrance to the outflow of His love to the poor sinner.

But how are you and I saved? We are saved according to the fulness of the love of God, through the redemption work of His Son. Our very need has brought out the occasion for God to show forth His love and mercy at the cross, where redemption was accomplished and atonement made.

Think, dear friends, of man despising Christ! No, I won't say despise; I will use another word—neglecting so great salvation. Neglecting—just carelessness and indifference to the salvation that has cost God so much.

"We are His workmanship." We see that wonderful company of saints called the Assembly of God, the Church of God. And, O, it is blessed nearness to Christ, and He looking upon it, and thinking of what it cost Him, and they looking at Him and thinking of the price with which He bought them. How mutual is the joy.

Then there is another thing. Christ has a body, a people so intimately related to Him that He finds in it such joy, such eternal joy; and God has a family. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children." Ah, the Father's eye will rest upon those children, the objects of His own predestinating love, and the work of His Son upon the cross! "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (verse 7). God has all this joy in His family.

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." Suppose there were a defect in the workmanship: what a reflection that would cast upon the Worker! There are no defects.

I don't want to wander too far from the subject, but that word "new creation" takes in all that is true of the Christian—his new birth, the righteousness of God, nearness to Christ, God in Christ—it takes in everything. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 2 Cor. 5:17. (There is a new creation. J.N.D.)

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Rom. 8:1. There are many souls rejoicing in the truth of no condemnation, but we should not stop there. The first thing the soul learns is that he is beyond the reach of condemnation, and as far beyond it as Christ. Then he learns what there is for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Just think of those words, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." "Good works" are what become us in this new position. The law is the standard for man in the old creation; but the rule of the new creation is Christ.

God is not writing the law on the Christian's heart; He does not expect the Christian to keep the law. The rule of the old creation was what man ought to be toward his fellow-man and toward God. The rule of the new creation is Christ. What God writes upon the Christian's heart is Christ, so in 2 Cor. 4:11 it is the life of Christ, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." What a wonderfully simple thing is the rule of the new creation. We should be the reproduction of Christ. In that very Epistle the apostle says that we are to be, as Christ, "to God for a sweet smelling savor." Christ was a sweet savor unto God, for what He was in Himself. That is the rule of new creation; that is the good works that God before ordains, so to speak, that we should walk in them.

"That ... He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us." O, what it will be to find ourselves in the fullest and most intimate association with Christ in glory. Already it is true of us as to our position.

"Being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world!" What a disturbed condition and position! What a blessed contrast, that, "Now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." The nearness is in Christ. The means of our being there was by blood. O, how God has been able, according to His nature and character, and glory, to associate a poor sinner with Christ; to have him in His own presence, the object of His love. It is in Christ; but how can He have man there? Because Christ made atonement for sin.

What do you think such people are in the sight of God, and to the heart of God? "Now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Those brought near to Himself, and in the very nearness of His Son are loved as His Son is loved, and share His inheritance, heirs with Him. All is brought in at the cost of redemption, and that redemption by the blood of Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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