

RESURRECTED

Ephesians 2:1-10

It is not unusual to hear or read about someone having an organ transplant. This sort of thing is amazing to me considering all the connections of blood vessels and nerves that would have to be put together to make such an organ transplant work. Although such operations are not always successful, the concept of what is being done is fascinating. A heart transplant, liver transplant, lung transplant and even a face transplant seem like drastic measures. Why would someone have an operation like this done? The reason such an operation is necessary is obviously because the old organ was not functioning correctly and was damaged beyond repair and needed to be replaced with a healthy organ.

Is there a spiritual parallel to an organ transplant? The spiritual parallel is found in the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. In this case the “spiritual transplant” is that of a new life to replace the old life that is not functioning correctly and cannot be repaired or reformed.

Ever since the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world, people have lived by their wits. Consequently, people have developed strong soulish characteristics to the exclusion of spiritual development. As a result of “living by one’s wits” people tend to have an independent, self-sufficient nature. This nature (old life) finds its fullest expression in rebellion against God. It also expresses itself to a lesser degree in many activities considered to be “good.” This “good” side of man’s nature finds expression in many religious activities. People who live by their own wits and desire to do what is good will do things such as the Pharisees did. They will have a list of “dos” and “don’ts” that goes on and on. They will think that IF they can keep each of these, then they will be OK.

We still see this type of behavior practiced today in our churches. We have many programs and activities that create the impression of much “busyness,” but when we look to see what results from this, many times, the conclusion is “nothing.” We have not yet been fully delivered from a tendency to do things in our own strength in the flesh rather than let God work through us. Operating in “the strength of the flesh” is not necessary (nor desirable) once we have come to God and have become a member of the Body of Christ. Before we were saved, we did not have a choice regarding how we function because we were not capable of doing any differently. Our incapability was a result of being spiritually dead.

Once Dead (2:1-3)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3, NIV)

Paul had just told us (in the previous chapter) how high Jesus Christ has been elevated. He is above everything! He is over all in the physical and spiritual realms both at this time and times to come and even beyond time. Paul uses a lot of parenthetical phrases and descriptions that are interspersed in the overall main message. By concentrating on these teaching tools he used we can miss the bigger picture. For example, as we begin chapter two, we see the words “And you” or “Also you.” If we skip down to verses five and six, we skip the descriptors and see that just as Christ was resurrected and raised up by God’s great power, that we have been made alive in Christ and also we have been raised up and seated with Christ. This gives us the overall context of where Paul was going in this passage. Imbedded in this overall context we discover a lot about ourselves and the human condition apart from God’s saving grace.

Paul described the human condition as being “dead in trespasses and sins.” The result of sin (singular) is death – spiritual death which we inherit from Adam. In that “dead condition” the fruits that are produced from such an existence are described as “trespasses and sins.” People (apart from the new birth) are powerless to do anything differently because they have no source of strength other than what can be worked up in their own natural strength. Because such strength comes from our fallen nature, it is driven by pride and selfish interests and is the way most of the world operates. This is the driving force behind most of what is happening in the world today.

Paul described one influence as “the course of this world” or the “ways of this world.” The Greek word that is translated as “course” or “ways” is “aeon” which is sometimes translated as “world” but is closely related to the idea of “times” or “the cultural norms” or maybe even similar to the idea of “dispensation.” In other words, we are influenced by what is accepted in the times and situations (customs, habits, traditions and political correctness) of our present-day world.

Another significant influence mentioned here is that which can be attributed to satanic or evil forces and we have seen such evil in operation in horrific ways in our lifetime. Paul may have also been referring to “pride and self-interest” that is characteristic of the nature of the devil. This nature wants its own way and thinks that its own thoughts and ideas are best (like eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). The “bad news” is that this nature brings the wrath of God. The “good news” is that even though we were in such a condition, God’s mercy provided a way of escape from the hopelessness of our lostness.

The third influence is termed the cravings of the flesh and the impact these have on our thoughts and world view. In unregenerate humans, the old nature and its sinfulness are indistinguishable from our natural strength and the strength of self. For the Christian, the Scriptures separate “old nature” and “natural strength.” For example, before the fall, Adam had natural strength as a result of being created by God. However, he did not have an “old nature” – before the fall. Consider the life of Jesus. He was born (but not of the seed of Adam) without an “old nature” but He did have natural strength. He had a self and a personality and individualism but He did not abuse that natural strength and He did not choose to live by Himself. He said “I can of Myself do nothing.” We can take that a step further and apply it to our situations and we recall the words of Jesus that said “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.”

For us, we start out with both an “old nature” and natural strength. While the Cross takes care of the “old nature” the natural strength must be dealt with. As Christians, we may be dedicated to doing God’s will and have the best of intentions of being pleasing to God; yet, we fail by being mistimed, misdirected and misunderstood because we could be operating in our natural strength. The bottom line is that we miss the target and the result is that we are NOT being pleasing to God. This is where we are trying to build upon the Foundation but the things we are putting up are wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor 3:12). We may be doing “God’s work” but we are doing it in our own strength. Such work will not stand the test of judgment. This may be why we see so many self-help project and even programs in churches that come upon the scene and look impressive at the beginning but they fail to last because they are not built of gold and silver and precious stone but of wood, hay and stubble. There is a better way: As Paul said in the verse four, “God is rich in mercy and has great love for us.”

Now Alive 2:4-7

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in

the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7, NIV)

The truest expression of the great love that God has for humanity is in the giving of life even when we were dead, did not deserve it, and could not do anything to earn it. Slaves have no rights and no resources and cannot buy themselves out of slavery. Someone else has to act in their behalf and this is what God did for us in Christ Jesus. This is God's grace in action.

Those who have come to God through Jesus have been given a new life. Paul used the term "quickened" which means to be given life. This is what Jesus described as the "new birth" in His conversation with Nicodemus as recorded in the Gospel according to John.

This love is further shown in that we have fellowship with Jesus Christ and actually participate in determining what happens in this world. That is, we have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. How do we participate in determining what happens in the present day world? You have heard that "prayer changes things" and it does. John Wesley is given credit for saying that "God does nothing in the affairs of man, except in answer to prayer." The really exciting thing is that we haven't seen how great it will be in the age to come. Then, we will see how great God's grace really is.

In verse seven Paul gave us some insight regarding the purpose that God saved us. According to Barnes Notes, the conversion and salvation of sinners is to furnish a *proof* of the mercy and goodness of God, their conversion may be an *encouragement* to others, and the conversion of great sinners (such as Paul considered himself to be) is a special proof of God's *divine kindness*.

Through Grace Alone (2:8-10)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV)

It is rather sobering to realize that we have nothing of our own and that we have no means to obtain anything on our own. It is by the GRACE of God that we have anything available to us whether material or spiritual. In our deadness we were without the power to make ourselves alive. In our deadness we were without the power to do the will of God. In our deadness we were not capable of doing anything that would make us worthy to deserve salvation. We were utterly hopeless, but God helped us anyway. This is what grace is all about. The result of His help is that the legal hold that Satan had on humanity was broken and, consequently, any of us could walk away from bondage to sin. We have been rescued or saved. That is the objective truth. The subjective truth that we have to face is that we must make a faith response to what God has provided for us. God has given to each of us a measure of faith so that the whole process springs from God. We provide nothing but a choice of whom we will serve.

Humanity is full of pride in what man can do and we derive a great deal of satisfaction in what we accomplish. This pride is part of the nature of Satan and, consequently, if we were to contribute anything to the salvation process we would have reason for pride which is contrary to the nature of God. Many religions of Paul's day taught that people had to do "things" to earn the favor of their gods. This is **not** the case with our God. Our salvation is not of works and we have no reason for boasting but we have much reason for humility.

Now that we are saved, we have access to His strength and His power and can do all things through Him. God expects us to use the power He supplies to us to do the work of the Kingdom of God. Before we were saved, we did the work of the world system using our wits and selfishly driven energies. It seems quite reasonable that we would now apply the new

strength given to us for the purposes of the One who supplies that power. God has a plan and it is our responsibility to fit ourselves into that plan. We are not asked to work out our own plans and then ask God to bless them. If we work according to His plan, He will automatically bless them.

What are some ways that we can use the strength and power that God supplies to us to do the work that He has saved us to do? What are some of the things Jesus told His disciples they were to do? We could list such specifics as “the great commission” and find things like that in the scriptures. In John 14:12 Jesus told them (and us) what they were to do in fairly broad terms. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

The work God has for us are things such as Jesus did. We could list these. He healed the sick, taught, comforted, fed people, prayed for others, cast out demons, talked about the Kingdom.

Are we supposed to do such things? How do we see ourselves in relationship to the work we do in the church? If we teach Sunday School, work in Awana, sing in the choir, work in the Nursery, mow the grass, greet people as they come to church, help out with repair work, and such things, then what do we call ourselves and other who do such work? We consider ourselves to be Volunteers!

Sometimes we confuse the concept of being a “volunteer” with simply being “unpaid.” What about the Apostle Paul? He did not accept payment for what he did. Would you classify him as a “volunteer” or was he “called” by God to do the work he did? Paul described himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. If he were a volunteer, then it would have been his decision to do the work he did and he could have gotten discouraged and quit whenever he wanted to.

We tend to divide people in the church into two groups: clergy and the laity. Ask yourself: Does God **call** only the clergy or does He also **call** the laity? Does the call of Jesus in the Great Commission apply to everyone? We say it does. Does God have a work for every believer to do? According to John 14:12, we would have to say “Yes!” since it was in reference to “those who believe on Jesus’ name.” We all agree that Ephesians 2:8-9 applies to all people who believe (“For by grace are you saved . . .”). What about Ephesians 2:10 (For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.)? Does that apply just to “clergy” or to all believers? The church is often referred to as the Army of God. We say we are “soldiers of the Cross.” Is the Army of God made up of volunteers who can quit and go home when it gets uncomfortable or is it made up of the “called” and the “committed?”

Since we are in Christ Jesus and He is living His life through us, then we are now able to do all these things that speak to the purpose for which we are saved. If the Spirit of God is in us and the life of Jesus is being lived out through us, then we should be doing the works that Jesus did. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus ministered to people He was in His physical body. How does Jesus minister to people today? Through His Body! What do we call His Body? The Church. Who makes up the Church? We do! So, if God has jobs for us to do, then where should we look for expression of these jobs? In His Body. In the Church.

How would you describe a person who did these things? The word “Obedient” comes to my mind. Another word that I have trouble separating its meaning from the meaning of the word obedient is “Faithful.” An obedient person is characterized by obedience. A faithful person is characterized by faithfulness. Are these characteristics important to God? Absolutely!

In Genesis 1:26 we are told that God declared that He was going to make man in His own image. That process was interrupted by sin and has been restored by Christ's act of salvation.

What we are in Christ Jesus is a result of what God has done. God had a purpose and that purpose involves our exercising dominion over the earth in a responsible way. This includes proper relationships with others and making things better for everyone. It includes showing love rather than selfishness, humility rather than pride, being positive rather than negative. These things are the good works that God intended man to carry out even before man was created. As we operate out of such good works, we can see that alienation with others will be reduced and that peace becomes possibility in our new life.