

Day 162, Ephesians 2

by David Servant

We are saved by grace through faith, and the same grace that saves us also transforms us, enabling us to follow the commandments of Christ.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-21

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Unity In Christ"

Description

David Servant addresses the misconception that being 'dead in our trespasses and sins' means we are unable to repent and believe in Jesus, emphasizing that this does not negate our ability to make moral choices or respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction. He highlights that salvation is by grace through faith, leading to a transformation that results in good works. Paul's teachings in Ephesians 2 also emphasize the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, with the Mosaic Law being fulfilled by Jesus' sacrifice, freeing believers from its condemnation.

Transcript

It is sometimes argued that, because Paul wrote that we were formerly "dead in our trespasses and sins" (2:1), his statement somehow proves that it would have been impossible for us, even under the drawing of the Spirit, to repent and believe in Jesus. "Dead people can't believe," it is said, thus if they are to believe, it requires a sovereign act of God, and so those who are saved must be those whom God has selected, not those who have selected God by means of their God-given free will.

Isn't it also true, however, that dead people can't eat, breathe or think? So if being "dead in our trespasses and sins" somehow proves that we were unable to believe in Jesus since "dead people can't believe," then it also must be true that we were unable to eat, breathe or think. This exposes the absurdity of such reasoning.

Indeed, unregenerate people are spiritually dead, are under the influence of Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" (2:2), and they "indulge the desires of the flesh" (2:3), but this condition does not make it impossible for them to resist temptation, make moral choices, or repent and believe in Christ under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. This is what Scripture continually affirms. And once we have repented and believed, the Holy Spirit continues His gracious work, regenerating our spirits, what is nothing less than a spiritual resurrection (2:7).

Our response to the Holy Spirit's conviction does not diminish the grace of God in salvation, any more than my accepting a gift from anyone diminishes the grace in their act of kindness. No one has ever accused me of "taking credit for" or "earning" the birthday gifts I've received, just because I actually believed that my friends wanted to give me gifts and I accepted them. Any person of average intelligence can understand this simple truth.

We are saved "by grace through faith" and "not as a result of works" (2:8, 10), but not so that we could then sin with impunity. Rather, the same grace that saves us also transforms us. We are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (2:19). Workless "Christianity" is worthless Christianity, of which there is no shortage today.

Ever-vigilant against the Jewish teachers who were infiltrating Christian churches and persuading Gentile believers to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law, in the second half of today's chapter, Paul fortifies his mostly Gentile readers from being seduced. If they believed what Paul wrote, it would have stopped the Jewish legalists from making any inroads in Ephesus. Although the Gentile believers were not circumcised, Paul reminds them that circumcision is "performed in the flesh by human hands" (2:12), which is of no comparison to the work that the Spirit had performed in their spirits. Thus, they should not be intimidated by the condescending looks of proud Jews. And although they were previously alienated from God and His covenant with Israel, that was no longer true because of Christ, who brought them near through His cross.

Paul is quite forthright in declaring that Jesus abolished "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (2:15). He could have only been speaking of the Mosaic Law. The old covenant had been fulfilled by the new covenant, the benefits of which are now available to everyone who will believe, circumcised or uncircumcised. Thus, there is no division between Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ. They are now one body, or one "holy temple" in Christ (2:21).

Rather than be upset with this, Jews should be thrilled, as the Mosaic Law was "the enmity" that Jesus "put to death" (2:16). The Law did not save them, but only condemned them as they broke its requirements. In light of all that we've read in the New Testament about the end of the Mosaic Law, it is surprising that new covenant Gentiles in our day sometimes put themselves under its curse. We are free from the Mosaic Law, and obligated now to follow the commandments of Christ.

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