

Before And After

Ephesians 2:1-7

Sharon and I have taken a liking to watching the home improvement shows on television. It's fascinating to see how a neglected backyard, an outdated kitchen or bathroom, or even an entire house can be transformed into something modern and sleek. After all the hard work, budget problems and structural surprises, the houses take on an entirely new look, so that they frequently do not even remotely resemble what they were before. The program will always conclude with "before" and "after" scenes, so viewers can see the stark contrast.

At the end of chapter one, Paul has just told us about the incredible power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, seated Him at the right hand of God, and made Him ruler over everything. As we move into chapter two, we learn something absolutely stunning in its importance: that all that has happened to Christ, God in His power has caused it to happen to us as well! And it has made a very big difference. In fact, Paul says that the contrast between our old lives before Christ, and our new lives after Christ, is like the difference between death and life. "Before" we were dead in our sins. "After" we have been made alive together with Christ. And so much more!

Let's look at it a little closer. First, let's look at what we were...

1 Before Christ, vv. 1-3

This may come as a shock to our modern sensibilities, but the Bible says that before we met Christ, we were "*dead in our transgressions and sins.*" In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus told in Luke 10, He said that the thieves left their victim "half-dead." But that's not the word used here. We are not just weakened by sin, or sick with sin. No, Paul says that before Christ we were "*dead,*" with no life in us. It is important that we never forget this, that before Christ, we were spiritually dead, with all that that entails.

It's important that we understand what Paul is talking about here, so let's look at the words he uses in verse one: "*transgressions*" and "*sins.*" The pictures they paint for us are vivid. "*Transgressions*" means to step over the line that divides right from wrong. Some versions use the word "trespasses." When I am guilty of trespassing, it means that I have gone somewhere I wasn't supposed to. I have stepped over a property line that divides where I can go from where I shouldn't. So this means that we say to God, "I know where the line that separates righteousness

and sin is, and I'm going to step over it anyway." And every one of us is guilty of having done that.

"*Sins*" had the idea originally of missing an animal as when shooting an arrow with a bow. Later it came to mean missing a goal or target. So in the Bible this word means to miss the mark of righteousness the way God defines it. And we are guilty of that as well. Notice that both words, "*transgressions*" and "*sins*," are plural, which indicates to us that this is habitual, not just a one-time failure.

Someone has said, "If sin were blue, we'd be blue all over. Part would be dark blue, part would be sky blue, part would be light blue, but every part would be blue in one shade or another."

How did we get that way? Is it the result of upbringing or surroundings or even genetics? Did we fall in with the wrong crowd or make some bad choices? None of those. The Bible makes it very clear that we are sinners from birth. Psalm 51:5 reads, "*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" So how did we become sinners? We are born that way, and even though we are alive physically, we are dead spiritually.

Imagine that in your yard you have a pecan tree and a pear tree. When you want pecans, you don't go to the pear tree, and you don't expect to pull pears from the pecan tree. The pecan tree bears pecans because it is a pecan tree. Left to itself, it could never bear anything but pecans.

In the same way, you and I commit sins because we are sinners. Left to ourselves, we could never produce anything but sin in our lives. We may be pretty good people, and well-liked and respected by everyone who knows us, but we are sinners. The Bible tells us in Isaiah that all our righteous acts are like a filthy rag (64:6). Paul quoted from the Old Testament when he wrote in Romans 3:

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (vv. 10-12)

The burden of our sin is too great for us to carry, once we become aware of it. One man was preaching on the street, when a young man challenged what he was saying. He said, "You tell us about the burden of sin, but I don't feel anything." Then, perhaps thinking he would get a laugh from his friends, he continued, "How much does sin weigh? Ten pounds? Eighty pounds?"

The preacher answered, “Well, if I put a 400-pound weight on the chest of a dead man, would he feel it?” “Of course not,” scoffed the young man. “He’s dead!” The preacher responded, “And the man who feels no load of sin is dead spiritually.”

And since the wages, the result, the outcome of sin is death (Romans 6:23), then it is quite natural that we read here in Ephesians 2:1 that we “*were dead in [our] transgressions and sins.*” It is a hopeless, helpless condition of the human heart, and nothing we do can change it.

Because of that sinful condition, Paul says at the end of verse three that “*we were by nature objects of wrath.*” Take a look at that word “wrath,” because it is very descriptive. When we think of wrath, we think of explosive anger, but God is not a God who loses His temper like that. This word literally means that the wrath of God is like a balloon that swells gradually more and more until it finally bursts.

Don’t be deceived about this! It may appear that God is allowing the sins of mankind to go unpunished, but gradually, more and more, the human race without Christ is heading toward judgment.

Jeremy Bentham was an English philosopher who became known as the founder of a system of thought called “utilitarianism.” He was also known for his dark humor. He left his entire estate to the University College Hospital in London, with one stipulation: that his body be preserved, dressed in his finest clothes and wearing a hat, seated in one of his favorite chairs, and placed where it would be in attendance at every hospital board meeting. It can still be seen in a large mahogany cabinet in the hallways of the University five days a week. So to this day, when it is time for the annual meeting of the administrators, the cabinet is rolled into the board room, and the chairman of the board, in calling the roll, says, “Jeremy Bentham, present but not voting.” Bizarre, yes. But in spite of all his efforts, Jeremy Bentham has remained dead for more than 180 years.

All of our best efforts to live “good” lives, to be righteous before God and others, is like a dead body propped up in a mahogany cabinet. There is no life there. There is no vitality. There is only death. And that is what we were *before* Christ. But now let’s look at what happens...

2 After Christ, vv. 4-7

Verses 4-5 is the turning point, and these are such beautiful, precious words: *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead.”*

“But God.” We were dead, but God! We trespassed the boundaries of sin, but God! We had no hope, but God! We followed the ways of the ruler of this world, but God! We gratified our lustful cravings, but God! We were objects of the wrath of God, but God! Do you see the contrast?

Robert Boyd Munger wrote a sermon years ago which was later published in a book of which there have been sold more than ten million copies. It was entitled, *“My Heart Christ’s Home.”* He wrote about the change that came into his life after Christ: *“One evening I invited Him into my heart. What an entrance He made! It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but very real. Something happened at the very center of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire on the hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness, and He filled the emptiness with His own loving, wonderful fellowship. I have never regretted opening the door to Christ and I never will -- not into eternity!”*

If we were to devise a plan whereby people could go to heaven, we would probably come up with a list of qualifications. Do this, do that. Don’t do this. Make sure you’ve done this. And when the dust settled, our list would include those who were the best in society, the “good” people, the ones everyone else admires. Our list would be populated with the best-known, best-connected individuals. And to go to Heaven, you just had to make sure that other people had a high opinion of you, that you treated others with respect, and that you were an overall good person. The list of names would include people that we ourselves like. Our enemies, or even the people we dislike, would be excluded. Forever.

But anyone could do that. It wouldn’t require much time, thought or effort to develop a list like that. And certainly no love. Only God would think of making it possible for even the vilest, most despicable among us to go to Heaven. He did it through the death of His Son, Jesus, and when we repent of our sins and surrender control of our lives to Christ, our names are written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Paul used three very special words to describe the amazing things that happen to us once we come to Christ. We won't detail what those words are, except to say that we can see them in our English translations in the word "with." Verse five tells us that God "*made us alive with Christ.*" In verse six we see that "*God raised us up with Christ,*" and then, that He "*seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*"

Compare those words with 1:19-20, where Paul was talking about the power that raised Jesus from the dead: "*That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*" Do you see the connection? In chapter one, God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. In chapter two, God raised us from the dead with Jesus and seated us **with** Jesus in the heavenly realms.

This concept of our being with Christ is one that is scattered throughout the New Testament. Here is a sampling: "*I have been crucified **with** Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20). From Romans 6: "*We were buried **with** him through baptism into death....Now if we died **with** Christ, we believe that we will also live **with** him*" (vv. 4, 8). "*Since, then, you have been raised **with** Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God...For you died, and your life is now hidden **with** Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:1, 3).

Paul is so certain of this precious truth that he uses verb tenses as if it had already happened! This is a promise from God, and since it came from Him, it is sure and certain.

Before we came to Christ, we had no hope. We were dead in sin and objects of the wrath of God. After we came to Christ, we entered into a new relationship with God, and were given a new standing in and with Christ. This means that wherever Christ is, there we are also. And since the Bible states several times that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, where does that put us? Also at the right hand of God! That is a place of honor and authority, which has been given to us because of our relationship with Christ. It means that we have the ear of Almighty God for our petitions. It means that we are within the sphere of God's incomparable power, there at His Right Hand. And it means so much more.

However, if you are without Christ today, the Bible describes you as being dead. This is not an insult to your accomplishments and upbringing. This is not to

denigrate your personality or your intentions. It is a simple statement of fact. Without Christ, who is the Life, there can be no life, and if you have rejected Him thus far in your life, the Bible says you are dead.

Know this: the Bible also says that without Christ you are an object of the wrath of God, and it is slowly building until one day there must be a reckoning.

But you can live! You can live, if you place your faith in Jesus and surrender your life to Him. You can know the joy of being raised with Christ and being seated with Him. It can happen to you today, because of God's great love for you.

This "Before and After" we've been talking about today is not necessarily one you can depict with two side-by-side photographs. But it *is* the difference between death—and life!