

Revived Together

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Passage: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:4-5, ESV).

Introduction: World War I broke out across Europe after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on June 28. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. On August 3, 1914, Germany declared war on France. Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire (the Central Powers) fought against Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan, and the United States (the Allied Powers). Both sides were counting on a short, decisive conflict that would end in their favor. “You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees,” Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany assured troops leaving for the front lines in the first week of August 1914.

The cradle of this horrendous war (which killed around 20 million) had been the center of Christianity for centuries. In 1914, of the estimated 560 million Christians in the world, 68 percent lived in Europe compared to only 14 percent in North America. *A number of Christian leaders across Europe advanced the cause of war and state-sponsored violence.* The rhetoric around World War I included religious rationales, with official churches playing key roles in heightening ideological hatred during the conflict. For example, the Anglican Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram (1858-1946), preached to his congregation in 1915:

Everyone that loves freedom and honor...are banded in a great crusade - we cannot deny it - to kill Germans: to kill them not for the sake of killing, but to save the world; to kill the good as well as the bad, to kill the young men as well as the old, to kill those who have shown kindness to our wounded as well as those fiends who crucified the Canadian sergeant, who supervised the Armenian massacres, who sank the *Lusitania*, and who turned the machine guns on the civilians of Aerschott and Louvain - and to kill them lest the civilization of the world should itself be killed.¹

Sermons preached from Christian pulpits throughout Europe played a role in shaping public opinion about the war. French pastors argued that Prussian-German militarism was the continuous outgrowth of the same Teutonic barbarism that had destroyed the Roman Empire. German pastors preached that German *Kultur* (culture) was the true preserver of eternal values in the face of the atheism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Voltaire (1694-1778), which had unleashed the destructive forces of the French Revolution leading to the present war.

But not all pastors were preaching a hateful theology of cultural superiority. Not all Christians believed that their side was fighting a just war on God’s behalf. On August 30, 1914, four weeks

¹ Quoted in Audoin-Rouzeau, Stéphane/Becker, Annette: 14-18: Understanding the Great War, Temerson, Catherine (trans.), New York 2002, p. 103.

after World War I broke out, a twenty-eight-year-old German-Swiss pastor named Karl Barth (considered by many to be the 20th century's most influential theologian) preached a sermon based on Isaiah 30:15 ("In quietness and hope shall be your strength").² Barth preached amidst tensions between the German-speaking majority in Switzerland, who tended to sympathize with the Central Powers of Germany, and the French-speaking in Switzerland who sympathized with the French, British, and their allies. For obvious reasons, the Swiss government chose neutrality.

Barth believed "the present war is largely a racial conflict" rooted in the "ancient antagonism between the Germans and the French." He pointed out to his congregation that "...the present war is a power struggle...regarding who has or should have first place in Europe." He continued, "Now the hidden power struggle has come out into the open." With prophetic insight, he warned, "We simply cannot wish that one or the other side should be victorious; for if now one of the two sides should win...there would be haughtiness on the winner's side and a sulking thirst for revenge on the side of the loser."

Regarding the invocation of God on both sides, he said, "We should not and do not want to let ourselves be confused because of the many prayers and much talk of God that are heard far and wide." He continued, "And let us not forget that God shows himself as a master very different perhaps from the one who is prayed to on both sides." He courageously declared, "It is simply out of the question that God 'helps' the Germans or the French or the English...God helps justice and love. *God helps the kingdom of heaven, and that exists across all national boundaries.*"

Again, with prophetic vision, he warned, "The foolish mixing of patriotism, war enthusiasm, and Christian faith could one day lead to the bitterest disappointment." With a Spirit-led, truth-honoring neutrality, he said, "For no nation do we desire victory or defeat...We hate no one...We hate only the war and the selfishness and pride that have ignited it."³

Nearly 20 years before Karl Barth preached his sermon, Ellen White wrote, "Christ in the German believer will recognize Christ in the French believer."⁴ The context in which she wrote this was not World War I, but it might as well have been. Anne Lamott wrote, "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." What Karl Barth preached in 1914 speaks to the heart of what Paul was addressing in his letter to the Ephesians.

When God's mercy and love are properly understood and his grace experienced by those who are mindful of their previous hopeless and helpless position, feelings of superiority over other people dissipate. Paul's vision for the church in Ephesus and the surrounding region of Asia Minor is that of unity among people (Jews and Gentiles) who were previously alienated.

² Karl Barth's World War I sermons were published in English in *A Unique Time of God*, translated and edited by William Klempa.

³ Barth, K., & Klempa, W. (2016). *A Unique Time of God: Karl Barth's WWI Sermons*. Westminster John Knox Press, p. 96-101

⁴ Ellen White, 4LtMs, Lt 23, 1885, par. 41 (Published in *Manuscript Releases*), vol. 15, p. 362

Body:

- I. Paul describes the spiritual death of the Gentiles (and of the Jews) prior to God's gracious rescue (2:1-3).
 - a. "And you⁵ were dead," Paul begins.
 - i. The conjunction Καὶ ("and" or "likewise") links what follows (2:1-10) with the previous paragraph (1:15-23).
 - ii. Paul has just referred to "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe [πιστεύοντας]...that he worked in Christ when **he raised him from the dead**" (1:19-20).
 - iii. Jesus was dead and was raised by God's power. They were dead and God "made us alive together with Christ" (2:5).
 - iv. The "you" refers to "you Gentiles in the flesh" (2:11) who "heard the word of truth...and believed [πιστεύσαντες] in him [Jesus], [and] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (1:14).
 - v. In Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, the father describes the younger son as one who "was **dead**, and is **alive**; he was **lost**, and is **found**" (Lk 15:32).
 - vi. Paul said that a woman "who is self-indulgent is **dead** even while she lives" (1 Tim 5:6).
 - b. Paul explains in what way these believing Gentiles were once dead—"in the trespasses and sins⁶ in which you once walked."⁷
 - i. Paul describes their past as one in which they were "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God" (4:17).
 - ii. In his letter to the Romans, Paul provides a sample list of the "trespasses and sins" of the Gentiles, which sprang from their "dishonorable passions" (Rom 1:26).⁸

⁵ The noun "you" in verse 1 is plural and in the second person, accusative case. The verb συνεζωοποίησεν ("made us alive together with"), to which *you* forms the object, doesn't appear until verse 5.

⁶ The words "trespasses [παραπτώμασιν] and sins [ἁμαρτίας]" are synonyms for Paul (cf Rom 5:20).

⁷ The verb περιπατέω (*peripateō*, "walked") is used at the beginning (vs 2) and end of this paragraph (vs 10).

⁸ In Ephesians 2:1-8, Paul is repeating in reduced form the comparison between Jews and Gentiles found in Romans 1:18—3:31. Markus Barth observes, "After the Gentiles' and the Jews' conditions are described separately, a final statement comprehending Jews *and* Gentiles sums up their common predicament" (Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008, p 212)

- iii. “For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men” (Rom 1:26-27).
- iv. “They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless (Rom 1:29–31).
- c. These former pagans were spiritually dead in that they were:
 - i. “following the course of this world” (2:2b);
 - ii. “following the course of the prince of the power of the air” (2:2c); and
 - iii. “carrying out the desires of the body and the mind” (2:3b).
- d. These former pagans followed a being referred to as “the **prince**⁹ [ἄρχοντα] of the power of the air.”
 - i. In Ephesians 6:12 the ἄρχάς (“rulers”) are depicted as part of the evil world of spirit darkness.
 - ii. This spiritual power “is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”
 - iii. The verb *energeō* (“is at work”) is used to describe what the “spirit” (of “the prince of the power of the air”) does “in the sons of disobedience.”
 - iv. This same verb is used later in Ephesians to describe God’s power “at work” (*energeō*) in God’s people (3:20).
 - v. This is the power (“the promised Holy Spirit,” cf 1:13) that works within humans and gives spiritual life.
- e. Paul acknowledges that he and his fellow Jews also lived “like the rest.”
 - i. Paul introduces the Jews, previously described as “we who were the first to hope in Christ” (1:12), as being “among [those who were spiritually dead and who] once lived in the passions of our flesh.”
 - ii. Believing Jews, like these former pagans, were also in need of deliverance (salvation) from (1) the overwhelming power of spiritual dark forces, and (2) the “wrath” (judgment) of God.¹⁰

⁹ The English translation “prince” in this passage comes from the Greek noun ἄρχοντα (*archonta*).

¹⁰ The Greek ὀργή (*orgē*), translated as “wrath” (2:3), is often used in the New Testament in association with God’s judgment (Matt 3:7; Jn 3:36; Rom 1:18; 2:5; 5:9; Rom 12:19; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 6:16-17; 19:15).

- II. Paul then introduces God's grace at work to bring life to those who were once dead—both Jews and Gentiles (2:4-8a).
- a. With the words “But God,” Paul shifts the focus from their previous hopeless and helpless state, to God's gracious intervention.
 - i. The adversative conjunction δὲ (“but”) indicates a contrast to the deplorable human condition tainted by sin, death, the devil, and flesh (2:1-3).
 - ii. Paul describes God as “being rich in mercy” and full of “love [ἀγάπην].”
 - b. While “we were dead in our trespasses,” Paul explains, God “made *us* alive together with Christ...raised *us* up with him and seated *us* with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”
 - i. Having said that “you [ὁμοῖς, second person plural] were dead” (2:1), he now says “we [ἡμεῖς, first person plural] were dead in our trespasses...”
 - ii. The “us” here is inclusive, unlike the “we” (Jews) in distinction from “you” (gentiles) in verses 1-3.
 - iii. Paul uses three compound verbs with the prefix συν (*syn*, “together with”) to describe what God does for those who were “dead.”
 - iv. In verse 5, he uses συνεζωοποίησεν (“made us alive together with”).
 - v. In verse 6, he repeats the idea of resurrection with the verb συνήγειρεν (“raised up with”) and συνεκάθισεν (“seated with”).
 - vi. This unpacks the meaning of “the mystery of his will,” which is “to unite all things in him” (1:10; cf 3:6).
 - vii. Jews and Gentiles are delivered from death and elevated to sit in heavenly places “together,” an important point Paul will make in the next paragraph (2:11-22).
 - c. Being raised from death to life because of God's rich mercy and grace is another way of saying that “by grace you have been saved [rescued].”
 - i. In verse 5, Paul interjects, in parenthetical form, the verb σεσωσμένοι (“saved”) to describe their deliverance from death.
 - ii. This is an act of God's χάριτι (“grace”).
 - iii. He did it because “he is rich in mercy [ἐλέει].”

- iv. He is rich in mercy because of his “great love [ἀγάπην].”
- v. Paul is not speaking of salvation as a legal adjustment of status (what many Protestants often understand by the phrase “forgiveness of sins”), but of a “new creation” (cf Gal 6:15), a transformation into a “new self” (4:24), which will result in the breaking down of “the dividing wall of hostility” between Jewish and Gentile disciples (2:11-22).
- d. These former pagans, having “heard the word of truth...and believed [πιστεύσαντες] in him [Jesus], were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13-14), which is given by God’s grace [χάριτι] through “faith [πίστεως]” (2:8) and results in spiritual life.
 - i. In most English Bibles, the connection between how these former pagans responded to “the word of truth” (1:13)—“believed”—and their means of appropriating God’s “grace” (2:8)—“faith”—is lost in translation.
 - ii. The Ephesians, who were spiritually “dead,” responded to “the word of truth” in “faith [they believed].”
 - iii. Consequently, God made them alive through his Holy Spirit “because of the great love with which he loved” them—“by grace you have been saved.”
 - iv. Peter reasoned that God gave the Gentiles “the Holy Spirit just as he did to us [Jews], and he made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles], having cleansed their hearts by faith [πίστει]” (Acts 15:8-9).
 - v. In this case, “cleansed their hearts” equates to “made us alive” (2:5), which equates to being “saved” (2:5, 8).
 - vi. This is why Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in the believer as “the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (1:14).
- III. God’s delivered (“saved”) people are described as God’s “workmanship,” implying that human boasting has no place (**2:8b-10**).
 - a. Ethical behavior (“good works”) flows from God’s deliverance from sin (“by grace you have been saved”), rather than God delivering people because of their morally uprightness.
 - i. God redeemed Israel by his grace and then gave them his commandments (Ex 20:1).

- ii. His concern for Jewish boasting seems to undergird this section.
- b. Paul is careful to stress the place of ethical behavior “so that no one may boast.”
 - i. Paul is clear that there is no moral superiority of Jewish believers in Jesus over Gentile believers.
 - ii. The salvation/election/deliverance of Gentile believers from spiritual death is based on God’s “grace,” not on their adoption of Jewish customs.
 - iii. There is no qualitative distinction between Jew and Gentile before God.
 - iv. God did not call Abraham’s descendants because they were superior to the nations (Deut 7:7-8; 9:4-6).
 - v. According to the prophets, Abraham’s descendants became as guilty before God as the nations (Amos 1:2–2:16).
 - vi. The remedy for spiritual death is God’s intervention.
- c. “For we are his workmanship,” Paul continues, “created in Christ Jesus for good works...”
 - i. Paul stated that God’s people will be showcased as his masterpiece in the coming ages” (2:7; cf 2:10).
 - ii. They are his masterpiece (“workmanship”), not because of works, but to display good works (2:10).
 - iii. For Paul, creation is associated with salvation, an idea rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures (Isa 41:11–20; 45:7–8; 51:9–11).
 - iv. Paul also linked salvation with the (re)creation of a new humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:24; cf. Col 3:10).
- d. God called them to “walk” in these good works, in contrast to the “trespasses and sins in which you once walked.”
 - i. The verb *περιπατέω* (*peripateō*) is used at the beginning (vs 2) and end of this paragraph (vs 10).
 - ii. While spiritually dead, the Ephesians “walked” “in the trespasses and sins.”
 - iii. Having been saved/rescued from death, they “walk” in “good works.”

- iv. Ephesians 2:1-10 presents “a grim *anthropology* characterized by sin, death, the devil, and flesh. It is matched by the highest exaltation of man through resurrection and enthronement.”¹¹

Conclusion: In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul describes the moral condition of the Jews as no better than that of the Gentiles. He and his fellow Jews were “by nature children of wrath” as much as the Gentiles were. With this in mind, he strongly cautions his readers against feeling morally superior to others. There are no second-class followers of Jesus in the church. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles, if not for God’s intervening grace, would be dead spiritually and without hope. Paul’s theology (of salvation by grace through faith) encourages humility and a posture of grace toward those who are different. Rightly understood, it promotes unity among God’s people.

¹¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 252.