

From Guilt to Gratitude!

Eph 2:1-10; HC LD 1 QA2

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 24 January 2021, 16:30

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who normally pays a visit to the doctor?
Well, the one who is (painfully) aware that there's something wrong with him.
Now, granted, it's true that some people go to the doctor for every little thing.
It's also true that some others don't go to the doctor when they actually should!
But I have yet to see a person who refuses to go to the doctor when he/she had an accident which resulted in a tremendously sore broken arm, leg or rib!

So, who stands a chance to be healed?

The person who knows he is sick, acknowledges it, and then turns to the doctor for help!

Well, it is no different with our spiritual sickness!

Look, is that not why the catechism has, on Biblical¹ grounds, given a good answer to the question, "What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?"

Three things:

- *First, how great my sin and misery are;*
- *Second, how I am set free of all my sins and misery;*
- *Third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.*²

The sermon has three points:

- Sin
- Salvation
- Service

Sin (Ps 53:1-3; Rm 3:9-20; Eph 2:1&3)

My brother & sister, that which separates us from God is sin.

In the Ancient Hebrew mindset, sin meant *missing the mark*,³ but also *being crooked or twisted*⁴ – like a wall that has been measured with a plumb-line, but found to be crooked!

Well, the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 51 when he gives this damning news (in Rm 3:10-12)...

“There is *no one* who always does what is right – not even *one*!

There is *no one* who understands.

There is *no one* who looks to God for help.

All have turned away.

Everyone has become useless.

¹ The whole book of Romans is structured in this way.

² Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1 Answer 2.

³ See, e.g., “Im Alten Testament begegnet das Verbum im Qal ‘(ein Ziel) verfehlen, sich verfehlen’...”

(Knierim, R. 1978. **חָטָא** *ḥt'* sich verfehlen. **in:** Jenni, E. & Westermann, C. eds. Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band I. München : Chr. Kaiser Verlag. p.541).

⁴ “**פָּשַׁע** ... **vb. bend, twist** (so Arabic **عَوَى** ('*awā*));—**Niph.** ... —*be bent, bowed down, twisted*, Pr 12:8 *one perverted of mind*. **Pi. Pf.** 3 ms. **פָּשַׁע**, ... La 3:9 *my paths hath he twisted*;1.... Is 24:1 *its surface will be distort* ... **Hiph.** ... *the right have I perverted* (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 730). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

There is *no one* who does anything good; there is not even *one!*”

Did you hear how much the words “no one,” “all,” and “not even one” are repeated? So, you & I may have many differences, but in one thing we’re the same: We are all sinners. And sin separates us all from God!

You see, the Apostle Paul quotes the words of Ps 51 and applies them to the whole human race – on Jews and Non-Jews.⁵

That means whether you’re English, Dutch or Maori, or Chinese, African, Indonesian or Samoan,⁶ you – like every other person on earth – have blown it!

Indeed....,

- The all-out pleasure-seeker (and, at times, that’s all of us) has blown it, because he was pleasure-centred and not God-centred;
- The judgementalist (at times, that’s all of us, too) has blown it, because he was proud (high-minded) and not God-minded;
- The legalist (again, at times, that’s all of us) has blown it, because he was good-works-driven and not grace-driven

Well, here is the severity of the state in which humanity finds itself: sin is not only widespread, it is also deep! It does not just infect the entire person, from eyes to feet; no, it contaminates the very fibre of our being!

My brother & sister, have you seen a flower whose stem has been cut? Well, it’s separated from the very source of its life, isn’t it!?

In the same way, has sin not just left us *sick*, but *dead*!

Indeed, our New Testament passage (Eph 2) reveals in v. 1 & 5 that the person in sin is *dead* – “You were *dead* in your transgressions!”

Yes, we’re a long way away from our heavenly Father and, in ourselves, we don’t have a clue (or means) as to how to get back home again!

Congregation,

Many ancient nations (some modern ones, too)⁷ used to embalm their dead kings!

What else is that but a mere cosmetic way to try and keep a dead body alive!

Well, is the Christian author⁸ not right when he says that, to a more or lesser extent, we all do the same!?

We try to keep our dead spirits/souls alive!

- Some of us do this by becoming workaholics;
- others by becoming or greedy;
- yet others by turning into power-mongers or adulterers!

See? We try to pump life into our dead souls!

But alas! A cut-off flower is dead! And a dead body has no life!

Yes, cut-off from God, the soul withers & dies!

Well, *the consequence of sin is not simply a bad day or a bad mood, but a dead soul!*⁹

And the symptoms of a dead soul are clear:

⁵ Cf. Romans 3:9, ***What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin*** (NIV 84).

⁶ All the nations represented in the Reformed Church Wainuiomata

⁷ cf. e.g., the story of the Chinese who tried to keep Mao Zedong “alive” after his death in 1976 (LUCADO, M. 1996. In the grip of grace. Nashville, TE : W Publishing Group. p.60f.)

⁸ cf. Lucado (ibid:61)

⁹ My slight adaptation of the words of Lucado (ibid:62)

- poisoned lips & cursing mouths
- feet that lead to violence
- eyes that don't see God

Is it a wonder that people can be so vulgar and so immoral – as even many a TV ad or programme shows!?

Their souls are dead! That's why they're so vulgar!

And you know why the person who deals in methamphetamine can still sleep at night – and why the dictator still smiles? Sin has seared their conscience! It's as good as dead!

My brother & sister, *ultimately*, what is the solution to this severe problem?

- Is it more government laws?
- More policemen?
- More & larger prisons?

The answer is “No!” And it's “no” for the same reason as that more embalming lotion will not bring a dead king's body back to life!

Here's a true saying: “We don't need someone to disguise the dead; we need someone to raise the dead!”¹⁰

Well, this is the dark picture – a picture which the Apostle Paul sketches in Eph 2:1-3... *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² 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. ³ 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.*¹¹

It's as if, in these three verses, Paul first leads us into a pitch-dark room to show us the fatal consequences of sin!

Indeed, Paul first shows us how we are gropers in the dark! And we can hardly see our hands before our faces! All we, in ourselves, can do is stare into the night!

But, good news! Suddenly, from v.4 onwards, it's as if Paul removes the pitch-black shutters before the window!

And the result?

Well, suddenly the brilliant light of the Gospel streams in – and we find we are in point 2 of the sermon....

Salvation

We don't have a way to help ourselves. But God has a way!

That's exactly why Paul moves to v. 4 of Eph 2...

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

What Christ did with Lazarus, He does with all His loved ones!

That's good to know, for, you see, did not Martha say about Lazarus, “But, Lord, it has been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell!”?¹²

My brother & sister, Martha was actually speaking about us all!

The human race is dead, and there is a bad smell! Look at the world, today! Division & war in some places; gross immorality in others; and killings in yet some other places!

¹⁰ Lucado (ibid:62)

¹¹ Also cf. Rm 3:9-20

¹² cf. Jn 11:39

Indeed, when you look at the human race, you'd say we have been dead for a long, long time!

We've been in the muck & mire so long, that we've grown used to the stink!

Our task is not to try to get up, but to admit we are dead!

And here's another true saying: The only ones who are happy in the tomb of death are the ones who don't think they are there!¹³

And is that not, in effect, what LD1 A 2 says: If I want to get out of the "tomb of death" I must know & acknowledge how great my sin is and I must know & accept the one-&-only way to be freed from it!?

Well, how mind-bending is God's grace! I Love this illustration given by a Christian author, i.e., that God does not treat you & me and every repentant sinner the way your vehicle insurance company would treat you if, in one year, you handed in one claim after the other!

You see, the repentant sinner will never receive the following letter/response from God...

Dear Mr Smith,

I'm writing in response to this morning's request for forgiveness.

I'm sorry to inform you that you have reached your quota of sins.

Our records show that, since employing our services, you have erred seven times in the area of greed, and your prayer life is substandard when compared to others of like age and circumstance.

Further review reveals that your understanding of doctrine is in the lower 20 percentile and you have excessive tendencies to gossip.

Because of your sins you are a high-risk candidate for heaven. You understand that grace has its limits. Jesus sends His regrets and kindest regards and hopes that you will find some other coverage.¹⁴

My brother & sister, I'd like to reiterate: the repentant sinner who comes to Christ in sincerity of heart, will never hear such a message!

Yes, the *insurance company* will only cover the driver with the clean/good record, but the high-risk client!?

So, how is it possible that justification can come for those who are evil?

Well, I love verses 4 and 5, ***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***

See? Salvation comes from heaven downward!

Man has no way, but God has a way...!

Is that not why Eph 2:8 says ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast”?***

May I remind you that, on this score, there is no other religion like Christianity!

I love the way John Mac Arthur has put it: *“As far as the way of salvation is concerned, there are only two religions the world has ever known or ever will know – the religion of divine accomplishment, which is Biblical Christianity, and the religion of human*

¹³ My adaptation of Lucado (ibid:65)

¹⁴ My slight adaptation of the words of Lucado (ibid:70)

achievement, which includes all other kinds of religion, by whatever names they may go under."¹⁵

It is by grace – God’s grace – that you & I are made right with him!

Question: But does this not pose a dilemma? I mean, will forgiven sinners not abuse God’s grace?

Well, back to that car-insurance illustration (And I know that all illustrations have their limits. So, please let us not push this illustration beyond the point it wants to make):

Suppose the CEO of a car- insurance company wants to show mercy to a client who keeps on making accidents!

Suppose this CEO, for some or other reason, wants to keep this reckless driver as client.

What can he do?

Can he just close his eyes and pretends he has not seen/known about the client’s mistakes?

No!

Here are two reasons:

First: the integrity of that insurance company would be compromised – he would have to relax the standards of that insurance company, something he would/could not do!

Second: the driver would then be encouraged to keep on making mistakes!

Thus, my brother & sister, this CEO simply cannot be fair and merciful at the same time! He cannot offer grace by endorsing more mistakes!¹⁶

Well, is God going to lower His standard so we can be forgiven?

Is God going to look away and pretend I have never sinned?

No!

We want a God who judges all people in the same way – a God who does not show favouritism (Rm 2:11)!

See?

On the one hand, there is God’s holiness – a holiness that says (that) sin must be punished.

On the other hand, there is God’s mercy – mercy that says (that) the repentant sinner must be loved.

Well, imagine the CEO of the insurance company calls the driver who had those many mistakes into his office.

Imagine this is what the CEO tells this man:

Mr Smith, I can’t overlook your mistakes; to do that would be unjust. You see, to pretend you didn’t do them would be a lie!

But here is what I’ll do: in our records we have found a person - with a spotless past. He has never made an accident – not even broken one traffic rule!

This man has volunteered to trade records with you.

So, now we will take your name and put it on his record. We will put his name on your record!

So, we will punish him for what you did.

¹⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, p. 199). Chicago: Moody Press.

Also cf. Lucado (ibid:71)

¹⁶ Borrowed and adapted from Lucado (ibid:73)

*You, who did wrong, will then be declared right!
He, who did right, will then be declared wrong!*

Congregation, imagine the wretched/stunned driver asks the CEO, “Who is this man who wants to swap with me?”

Upon which the CEO says, “It’s me!”

Well, here’s the reality: If you & I are waiting for a CEO to say that, we can forget!

He can’t say that – even if he wanted to.

You see, on paper, this CEO might well have a perfect record, but that does not mean he is a flawless driver! Besides, who knows what the future brings for that CEO!? Next week he might need his own good record!

So, however good his intentions, that CEO can’t swap records!

But *Christ* can! And He *did*, for He is sinless (has perfect record)!

Yet God has made Him, who had no sin, sin for our sakes so that we could become right with God! (2 Cor 5:19, 21).

Well, let us ponder what God has done & is doing:

He does not condone our sin; nor does He compromise His standard!

He does not ignore our rebellion, nor does He relax His demands.

Rather than dismiss our sin, He takes it upon Himself and, incredibly sentences Himself.

So, God’s holiness is honoured, for our sin is punished. God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. Yet, we are made perfect!

God’s holiness as well as His mercy is upheld!

And, by God’s grace, the repentant sinner who has turned to Jesus in faith, finds his sins have been washed away!

Well, here’s a very important question: What sort of reaction should the person have who knows that his sins have been forgiven – and laid on the most loving Son of God!?

My Thankful Service

Please hear what the Apostle Paul says about those who have tasted God’s forgiveness:

They are people who *are eager to do what is good* (Tit 2:14).

And so, salvation has reached its beautiful end – to glorify God with our good deeds!

And is that not what Eph 2:10 says: “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*”?

Good works – not because I *have* to, but because I have been so moved and cut to the heart by the Almighty’s mind-bending love!

Question: Have you started at the beginning?

Yes, have you yet acknowledged your sins (your sinful state)?

If so, have you then turned to Jesus to receive God’s tremendous love gift?

You say “yes!”?

Well, then why shall you & I not live a life of enormous gratitude to the glory of God!?

AMEN (2,619 words excluding footnotes)