

"Grace that gives us life" (Eph 2:1-7)

1. The power that leads us to destruction

1-2

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.

Here Paul wrote about the power that leads us to destruction.

He says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." We were in sins and that's what it means to be dead. And we wouldn't know about it until someone points this out.

One feature of a sinner is that he doesn't know the fact that he is bound by sin and cannot do anything about it as if he was dead. And if someone points it out, usually he will be angry or upset.

It is not the work of man, but the work of the Holy Spirit that makes us realize we are dead in our transgressions and sins (John 16:8). Of course God will use man for this purpose. The Holy Spirit ministers to our heart and speaks to us, "You have sin. If you go on like this you will perish. That is eternal death."

When we were born again, we received the Spirit and he actively lives in us. What happens then? We know that our sins were forgiven. Then we don't feel sin any longer? Not like that. Actually, we will be more clearly aware of our sins, because the one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to help us to see our sins. Hearing this, some people may feel relieved, "Oh that's why. I have the Holy Spirit in me."

Jesus indeed received all our sins on the cross. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven. We are forgiven and the Holy Spirit lives in us. But we still live in this body in this world. Not only that, but sin are still in us (Rom. 7:17). Paul said, "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do. It is sin living in me that does it" (Rom. 7:19-20). We also feel the same way sometimes. Are Christians out of sin's influence? Not at all. Sin insistently influences everyone. As long as we live on this earth, in this body, sin keeps influencing us.

"While Paul teaches that the power of sin was broken through Jesus's death and resurrection and that through faith in Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit believers are no long slaves to sin (Rom. 8), we are still human being, affected by the generations, and we still live in a world thoroughly saturated by sin."¹

Christians have the Holy Spirit in them. So they will be sensitive toward sins. It is *not* that they don't feel sin any longer. That's the opposite. We will understand about sin more, because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is by God's grace that we feel pain when we realize we sinned, then we can come back to the Lord, remain in his grace, be transformed to be more like him. In this sense, repentance is not one time event. Rather, it's our attitude, life style of coming closer to him.

In v.2, it says "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."

"The ruler of the kingdom of the air", "the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient." In other words, they are evil spirits and Satan.

We used to follow evil spirits and Satan. I am not saying this, but the Bible is saying this. Probably there aren't people here who intentionally communicated with evil spirits or offered himself to Satan. Probably not. But we used to follow the ways of this world, right? And Satan and his angels, evil spirits are the ones who operate and mobilize the ways of this world. So we can say those who are dead in sins are, as a result, following Satan and evil spirits.

Paul also mentions "those who are disobedient". He says "disobedient". Think about it. What he mentions here is not "evil" or "unrighteousness" such as "cruelty" or "cold-bloodedness", but "disobedience". Being disobedient means you reject to do something, you hear but you ignore it, you know about something but you don't do it. That's disobedience.

You hear about God, but you ignore it. You sense that there is "God", but you don't care about him. You know about righteousness, but you won't practice it. You know about the truth, but go on living ignoring it (cf. Rom 1:19-21). There are evil spirits who works in those people. Those spirits draw people away from the truth and prevent them from turning back to God. I am not talking about 2000 years ago. Those spirits are at work right now.

The Bible says, there is "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who

¹ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time*, The Alban Institute, 2008

is now at work in those who are disobedient.” This spirit prevents people from hearing the message of the Bible (2 Cor. 4:4). This spirit works among those who heard the truth and know about God but don’t respond to the truth and ignore it (cf. Luke 8:12). And the spirit will make them even farther away from the truth and prevent them from coming back to God.

Satan doesn’t care for details. He is happy as long as people don’t believe in Jesus nor obey Jesus.

We need to pay attention this. That spirit can also work among us Christians.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

The battle is here in this point; standing firm in the faith. It’s not that we humans fight against Satan by ourselves, nor defeat evil spirits. But we will win victory by God’s mighty strength (Eph. 6:10-11). Here is the winning formula. “Submit yourself, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Satan flees from those who submit to God. There is a victory because we fight in this way. If we don’t fight, we will be just defeated.

We believed in Jesus and are saved. Then the battle will become even harder. We choose to submit to God using our freedom given by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:1). We submit to God, with the help, encouragement and courage from the Holy Spirit. We resist the devil who persistently tries to tempt us. We will move from victory to victory.

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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.

Paul started in v. 1, saying “As for you”. But now here he says “All of us”, including himself. He clarifies what he’s been speaking is not other people’s

affairs, but all of us were also like that.

You don't have to be a worst criminal to be the object of God's wrath. While doing what is accepted socially and morally, we can still live in our sinful desires. Even though there is no problem on the surface, we can oppose God, reject God's will and give priority to our own desire.

The Bible says that we used to be like that. We used to live, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts.

Let's summarize what we have seen so far. There is a power that leads us to destruction. And we live under its influence. There is the way of the world. And there is Satan who is pulling strings behind the scenes. We cannot live totally free from the influence of sin and Satan because we are still human living in this world.

2. Grace that gives us life

4-6

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. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

We used to be in the power that leads us to destruction. But God gives us grace that makes us alive.

Here we must see the contrast between the dead and the alive. For example, there is a river. You see two things in the river. One is a log, and the other is a fish. A log follows the flow of the river always. A log never goes against the flow. But a fish can go any direction by its choice. A fish can go following the flow, or it can go against the flow. What makes the difference? A log is dead, it has no life. But a fish is alive.

Being dead in transgressions and sins is the state where you have no power against sin, you are ruled by sin. Christians have been set free from sin by the cross of Jesus (Rom. 6:18). We live a new life.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was chained in prison. He must have felt the sense of impending crisis that he might be killed. But he says "We are made alive." On the other hand, those people who are outside of prison, who are not chained, but following the way of this world, gratifying the cravings of their sinful nature, are dead.

We used to be dead in transgressions. But now we are made alive with Christ, and God raised us up with Christ, and already seated us with him in the heavenly realms. That is who we are in Christ. We are the people who are already seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms. That's the mystery of God.

Paul, who was chained in prison, deprived of his liberty, truly understood this truth, and took hold of it as his own. And he says he wants the church, which is outside of the prison and unchained, to know this grace. He wants, actually God wants the church to know clearly that this grace is hers.

God has made us alive with Christ. We are made alive in His life. We are already in God's kingdom with Jesus. That is our lives. This is not by human achievements nor effort. It is only by grace you have been saved. God's unconditional love, redemption, and salvation made us alive.

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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.

God made us who used to be dead in sins alive with Christ Jesus, raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms. It shows how rich His grace is.

When an artist wants to make his work, if he wants to make a good production, he needs to use good materials. He will choose the most suitable materials among many. God chose each one of us as ones to show His glory, and to build the church His body. Can you believe it?

We used to be dead in our sins, follow the way of the world, gratifying the cravings of our sinful desire. We were heading straight for destruction. But God made us born again as the ones who live with Christ. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Our lives themselves show how great His grace is. That's God's strategy for the world evangelism.

We doubt it when we look at our own weaknesses. We must remember who Jesus is. Jesus is the one like this, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Matt. 12:20). A bruised reed is not good for anything. But Jesus will not break or throw away even things like that. A smoldering wick cannot be used as light, not just so, but it is also annoying with smoke. But Jesus won't snuff it out. He won't terminate it.

Even if we see ourselves and think we are like a bruised reed or a smoldering wick, that's okay. God can make us alive by His grace and transform us. So, people can see the wonder of God's grace.

We try our best to change ourselves, we try so hard to overcome sins and glorify God, but we fail. Here is the point: "The new life available to us stems from the Spirit, not from us."² We need to learn how to be led by the Spirit, how to live by the power of the Spirit.

"Most of us would like to be fixed permanently by the Spirit, but God has not chosen to work this way."³ But he changes us day by day through all the way of our lives on this earth (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

God chooses the weak in this world intentionally (1 Cor. 1:27). God doesn't choose gold and silver, but he chooses the jar of clay, and even chooses and uses the one with crack. It is to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Cor. 4:7).

We didn't choose Him. But God chose us. God chose you (John 15:16). He chose you among many people, and sent you to workplace, school, friends and even to family, saying "It must be you." God knows it very well that we are like a bruised reed or a smoldering wick. It doesn't matter at all. Because God's almighty power, His great power will work for his call (Eph. 1:19).

God made us alive who were dead in sin by His power, love and grace. This is our God. We are saved and loved by this God. So we don't have to worry or doubt, but we can trust him 100%, whole-heartedly. And God's glory is shown through us.

Today, we studied "Grace that gives us life."

² Ibid. p.163

³ Ibid. p.177

Actually we deserve destruction, and we would have no say even if we were abandoned. Just the fact that we are saved should make us truly thank God. We are loved by God, not just a little bit for a period of time. But we are loved by God with His perfect love for ever. We are loved by God of glory. How honored we are! There is no other grace as rich as this. If we understand this, how can we not love God? How can we hesitate to testify His love?

Even if we are bruised reeds, or smoldering wicks, that's okay. Even if we are cracked jars, that is okay. All we need to do is to trust God, listen to His Word and live His Word. God will do it. And he will complete it (Phi. 1:6). Grace gives us life.

For LifeNet groups and personal refraction:

1) Have you ever felt you are like a bruised reed, or a smoldering wick, or a cracked jar? In what kind of situation did you feel so? Why did you feel so? What did you do, then?

2) In this message, some works of the Holy Spirit was mentioned. Can you recognize those works in you? What is it? What was your response?

3) What kind of materials will an artist choose if he wants to make his work well? Knowing "God chose you (John 15:16)", what thought come into your mind? What does it mean to yourself, and to your life?

4) Take time to reflect on your life to see your own journey of Eph. 2:1-7. If God was not graceful, what would your life be like today? You may write down it. You may share it (by speaking) with someone this week.