

Raised with Christ by Grace

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Date: 09 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, we've got a Christianity Explored course running. Steve prayed for that just now. Some of you are part of that, which is wonderful.

It's a great way of finding out what it is to be a Christian. And in one of the sessions, they put it this way. Part of being a Christian is knowing that you are more sinful than you could possibly imagine, but more loved than you could ever know.

We wonder how can both those things be true at the same time? But knowing that is right at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. And it's right at the heart of what Paul wants us to know in our passage this morning.

We are more sinful than we could possibly imagine. But we are more loved than we could ever truly know. If you were here last time, you'll remember Paul told the church what he prays for them. And we saw it's simply this, isn't it? Not that God would give them more, but that they would know more of what God has given them.

[1 : 13] He prayed, verse 17, that God the Father may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. His prayer is that they would know God more personally, more deeply, know the vastness of what He has done for them and is doing for them.

What is the immeasurable greatness of His power at work towards us who believe? And this morning, Paul wants us to know that even more deeply.

He's not giving us extra things on top of that. Christianity plus X, Y, and Z things. No, He is taking us further up and further in to what God has done for us.

One clue that tells us that is that verse 1 of our passage doesn't quite flow, does it, from where we left off last week? Did you see that? Okay, we see it if we read in from verse 1, chapter 1, 22 and 23.

Just have a look. There were no paragraphs or headings in the original.

[2 : 43] Those have all been put in in our English translations. But you can see why they've done that, can't you? When we read it all together, it doesn't quite flow, does it? Normally, Paul is so clinical.

He takes us from A to B to C. But here do you see he's actually taking us back to the start of the story to tell us it all over again.

But this time with more detail. And he's going to do that again next time. We'll finish up today raised with Christ, verse 10. Verse 12, he'll take us back to the start again.

You Gentiles, remember that at one time you were separated from Christ. What's he doing? Well, a helpful way to think about last week's passage, this week's passage, and next week's passage, is to think of Paul as a wedding photographer.

You know, first the bride and groom. Now let's add the parents. Right? Now let's get both families together. The photographer is building up the picture, isn't he, of what's happened on that day.

[3 : 53] One thing has happened. Two people have been united. But there's more to it, isn't it? More than that. Two families have come together. And layer by layer by layer, we see the full reality of that in ever fuller and busier photos.

And that's what Paul's doing in these three passages. Three pictures of one great thing that God has done. But he's filling it out a little bit more each time.

Photo number one. Christ has been raised and seated in heavenly places. Photo number two. We have been raised with Christ and seated in heavenly places in him.

So there's the bride and groom. And photo number three next time. The two families brought together into the picture. One great event.

But three pictures to show what's happened on this cosmic wedding day. And so let's spend some time in this second picture then.

[5 : 01] So that we would grasp deeply the truth. That if our trust is in Jesus, we have been raised with Christ. By God's grace.

We'll do that in three points this morning. Who we used to be. What God has done. And finally, who we are now. Beginning then with who we used to be.

And Paul does not hold back, does he? Who were you? Who were you? Verse one. Who were you? And you were dead.

You know, I've heard a lot of people give their testimony how they became a Christian. And I don't think I've ever heard one person start where Paul starts. I was brought up in a Christian home. I believed in God. I was tempted to go a different way. But then I came back. Or life was going pretty well. But there were one or two things that weren't going so well.

[6 : 02] I realized then that I needed Christ. Have you ever heard somebody say, before I knew Christ, I was stone-cold dead to God?

Have you ever said that yourself? Paul's telling you now, that's where your story starts. You were spiritually stillborn. Your heart was flatlining.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. What's trespassing? We know, don't we? It's going where we're not meant to go.

It's overstepping a boundary. That's what we did. And the word for sin here means falling short. So we could think about it like this.

He's saying that we went where God told us not to go. And we didn't get to where he told us we should be. And it wasn't that we stumbled or you put a foot wrong.

[7 : 05] It's that we were the walking dead. There was not a spiritual spark in your soul. There was not a spiritual bone in your body. God was there.

Perhaps he even spoke to you. But you could not hear him. You could not respond to him. You were dead. So like rainwater flowing down the gutter into the drain, you followed the course that was set out for you by the world.

The way of life, even the choices that were put before you, that's the way you went, following the course of this world. And even more frighteningly, following the prince of the power of the air.

That's describing the devil. Like a puppet master, he ruled over you, controlling your choices. You did what he wanted. Now, to be clear, that's not saying necessarily we're demon-possessed.

And yet, and yet, there is certainly more spiritual darkness in our lives than we would recognize. If you're new to church and this talking about the devil feels a bit weird to you, don't worry.

[8 : 20] It feels a bit weird to most of us as Christians in this room, in the West, in the 21st century, the devil, really. But the Bible, from beginning to end, tells us that God has a great spiritual enemy who has real power and is at work.

And we once followed him. And so, because we followed the world and followed the devil, we therefore, says Paul, followed through on the passions of our flesh.

Carrying out the desires of body and mind. So, before we say, oh, that's just the way I was brought up. Or the devil made me do it.

Or I didn't have a choice. No, Paul says, yes, but. Yes, we did what the world wanted. Yes, we did what the devil wanted. But we also did what we wanted.

How does that work? Well, because the world, the devil, and us all wanted the same things. And so, that's what we did. Our bodies craved what our minds suggested to us.

[9 : 36] Our minds suggested to us what the world loves and praises. The world loves and praises what the devil wants. The devil wants what our minds suggested to us and what our bodies crave.

Round and round and round we go. We're trapped because we're dead in sin. Cannot get out. But that's not the worst bit.

Can it get any worse? It can. See the end of verse 3. What were we? We were by nature children of wrath.

Like the rest of mankind. The worst bit, brothers and sisters, is that our lives had consequences.

For the way we once walked, following this world, the way of the devil, following our own way, but not God's way.

God was angry with us. As he is angry, says Paul, with everyone who walks that way.

[10:40] We imagined this as a family photo, didn't we? But this family has no place in God's photo, does it?

Can you imagine on the wedding day, now let's have the corpse. Now let's have the children of wrath. Bring the sons of disobedience. No. No place in God's family photo.

And here's the thing. It's not just some of us, he says. It's the whole human family. Notice Paul points the finger at them, and then he turns it back on himself.

You were dead, verse 1, but we were dead, verse 5. You once walked, verse 2, but we all once lived, verse 3. We were children of wrath, verse 3, like everyone is.

And we want the searchlight to shift off of us, don't we, onto those really bad people. But he doesn't. Remember, he's talking to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

[11:50] He's writing to the church. Some of them used to practice magic. Some of them were brought up in the synagogue. All of them were upstanding and respectable citizens in their society.

But don't forget who you really were, says Paul. You were dead in sin, and you were destined for hell. You had no place in God's picture, no place in his family, no life, no spark of potential in you that God could use.

You were dead to him. And you didn't even know it. Friends, if you're not a Christian here today, please don't think I'm saying anything about you.

That I'm not also saying about me and everyone here. This is true of all of us, he says. All of mankind, all of humanity is like this.

It's true of us all, but it is therefore true of you. And Paul can only say to us, you were, past tense, because of what God has done for us next.

[13:05] But if your trust isn't in what God has done for us next, then this isn't who you were. It's who you are. Not past tense, present tense.

You are dead. You are more sinful than you could possibly imagine. But on to our second point.

You are also more loved than you could ever truly know. Here's what God has done. What has he done? Normally, I just tell you to find the verse, to look at it, to read it.

But this is so amazing. I don't just want you to look at it. I want you to read it with me out loud. See, after we've just seen about ourselves, we need to drink this in, don't we? We need to confess it.

Ready? Just look. It's there, verses four to six. Have a look. Find it with me. And we're going to read it. Ready? 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.

[14:18] By grace, he have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Wow. What has God done? We should be bracing for impact. He's just told us we were children of wrath.

This verse should say, so God, being full of anger because of the great anger she felt towards us. But it doesn't say that. It begins with a but.

But God. There's a preacher in London, Martin Lloyd-Jones. He preached four sermons on that one but, because it is the most important, most significant but that has ever been written.

Because it is the difference, friends, between what we deserve and what God has done instead. We were dead in sin, but he is rich in mercy.

[15:22] We were children of wrath, but he loved us with a great love. We're sometimes in our rush to make the gospel kind of neat and tidy for people.

We miss this, don't we? Our shorthand version says our sin makes God angry, but Jesus came and died for our sins and now God loves us.

But Paul wants us to know something better than that, doesn't he? He says you're short selling the gospel. Jesus' death on the cross did turn away God's anger from us, but God had never stopped loving us.

See that? What God did for us was because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses.

Can you wrap your heart around that? Unconditional love. Unconditional love. He loved us. He loved us before ever we had come into the world. He loved us when we had disobeyed him for the millionth time.

[16:24] He loved us when we were under his wrath. Sometimes people ask, don't they? Perhaps you've asked, how can God punish people forever if he loves us?

And we can talk about that. But friends, if we understood who we really were, our question would be the other way around. How could God love us if all we deserved was his everlasting punishment? Why did he love us? We get this at home all the time. Daddy, what are you doing? I'm doing this. Why? Because I am. Why?

Because I want to. Why? Just because. When we ask that question, we go as far back as we can. Why did God love us when we were dead in our sins?

Because that's just who he is. That's who he is. The holy God in whom righteousness and love find no contradiction. We can't understand that, can we?

[17 : 32] Friends, he loved us even then. It's too much for us to wrap our hearts around. And yet, as we were thinking earlier with the kids, isn't it? It is simple enough.

It's simple enough for the smallest child to grasp very simply, isn't it? Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Would we believe it otherwise? Jesus loves us. And because he loved us, what did he do? Verse 5. Made us alive together with Christ. What did he do?

Because he loved us, he raised the dead. And not only the one sinless one who death had no claim to, Jesus, but along with him, those who he loved and had chosen and predestined in Christ, he raised with Christ.

Not halfway, not a watered-down resurrection, but the whole way. He raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, at the right hand of God.

[18 : 45] So, brothers and sisters, get this. If you are in Christ today, you are as spiritually resurrected and raised and seated in the presence of God, as Jesus is physically resurrected and raised and seated in the presence of God.

See, this is us, isn't it? Going further up and further into what Paul prayed that we would know, when he prayed that we would know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power at work towards us, who believe the very power that he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

Are we grasping something of this power now towards you and me? It's not like resurrection power, is it? It's not like that power.

It is that power. It's not that God unplugged the spiritual defibrillator, and he plugged in a kind of soul massage machine to comfort us, to relax us.

You know, it's the same power, we say, but a different kind of outworking, a different outcome. No, it's the same power source, and it's the same work.

[20 : 10] It's the same defibrillator that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead. That is the power he works in us, not to relax and comfort us, but to start our hearts, to raise us from the dead.

And we need to know that, because nothing else will do, will it? It's so tempting, isn't it, to water down the problem.

It would be so tempting, wouldn't it, to come to those verses, you were dead, and say, oh yeah, but, no, we're not, no, when we do that, we water down the solution.

It's so tempting, isn't it, to say, my problem, my problem is anxiety, but Jesus gives me comfort. My problem is loneliness, but Jesus gives me friends.

Brothers and sisters, that may be true, praise to God, but your big problem, your big problem is that you were dead, and comfort does not raise the dead.

[21 : 25] Only, only Jesus back from the dead, body and soul resurrection, can bring you to life. If we water down the problem, we water down the gospel, but the gospel is no less great and glorious than this, that in his great love, God made us alive together with Christ.

And he does that completely freely. Paul even interrupts himself, doesn't he, to say, by grace you have been saved. Grace means we don't have to pay for it, it's a free gift God's given to us, from him to us in Christ with love.

And that's underscored, isn't it, by verse 7. Again, in our kind of shortcut version of the gospel, our neat and tidy version, we sometimes say, don't we, now God saved us by grace, now we should live for him in order to thank him.

As if, you know, because God saved us, we owe him this kind of infinite and unpayable debt of gratitude, which isn't quite grace, is it? It's a loan.

He gives us what we couldn't afford, but then we pay him back in installments with interest. But why does verse 7 say God saved us? Why did he do it? So that, in the coming ages, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us, in Christ Jesus.

[22 : 57] In other words, he raised you from the dead and seated you with Christ in the heavenly places so that he could spend eternity lavishing love, grace, and kindness on you, giving you the blessing that only Christ deserves, but that he gives to you freely by his grace.

Which is all the more amazing, isn't it? Because of what and who we were, children of wrath, dead in sin, consigned to hell, now, by God's love and grace and power, raised with Christ, seated in heavenly places, who we were, dead, what God has done, raised us with Christ.

And so, finally, Paul wants us to know who we are now. We are in Christ. And as we finish, all I want us to do is answer four questions about who Paul says we are now, to grasp our identity as God's people.

So, who are we? Firstly, where are we? Verse 6, where are we? We are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Obviously, you still live at your address.

Here we are on earth. But the spiritual GPS locates you at the right hand of God. Because we're united with Jesus, where he is, there we are with him.

[24 : 38] And Paul's told us what that means last time. It means, seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. You know, I can't imagine that there's a Christian on earth, let alone in this room, who doesn't sometimes feel totally outmatched by the world and outflanked by the devil and overwhelmed and crushed by our own sin.

And we wonder if it's worth it to keep going and keep resisting. We lose heart. We feel open and vulnerable to everything that God has saved us from.

But friends, know where you are now. You are seated with Christ far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion.

Those enemies cannot now touch him and so they cannot now harm us. He has triumphed over Satan. He has overcome the world.

He's defeated our sin. He's crushed death. He rose from the dead. He is seated at God's right hand with all his and our enemies under his feet. And if you're in Christ, you are there with him, seated far above everything and anything that might separate you from him.

[26 : 05] If you are there with him, you are protected. You are invincible in him. Sometimes he allows our enemies to loom large over us, to threaten us, to reach out their hands, to touch us, but only so that ultimately they and we would know that they are defeated and powerless to tear us away from him and remove us from his throne in heaven so that we and they would know his great victory over them in our lives.

That's where we are and therefore who we are in Christ. We are raised and seated with him.

Secondly, how? How are we?

Verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. We've seen it's a free gift.

He gives us life in Christ out of his love for us but we receive that gift through faith. Remember, this is life from the dead at power towards those who believe.

That is, those who trust only in what God has done for us to be saved. I was looking at our membership vows with some people this week and one of the questions you'll have heard at the front is this, do you trust in Jesus only by his death on the cross and bodily resurrection to save you from your sin and give you a right standing with God?

[27 : 45] Friends, can you answer that question? Can you answer that question for yourself? Can you say yes? He died and rose again for us but Paul says what his death and resurrection achieve for us, that spiritual resurrection and rescue from sin is only ours if we trust him wholeheartedly for it.

faith has been compared to resting our whole weight on a chair trusting that it will hold us up the whole weight of our life.

Think about it, our sitting down adds nothing to the chair, it's the same as before we sat down on it.

So our faith adds nothing to what God has done but it is how what he has done becomes ours.

Friends, if you're not a Christian here you've heard some very, very, very bad news about you this morning and you've heard some even better news about God. How can what Christ has done become yours?

Well, this is how. Christ has saved his people so rest the whole weight of your existence on his death and resurrection and by his grace you will be saved resurrected, raised, seated with him.
[29 : 08] Where we are, we're raised and how are we there? By faith. Thirdly, what are we? What are we now?

Look, verse 10, what are we? For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. People talk about giving their furniture new life, don't they, when they give it a lick of paint or repurpose it, but God's not just upcycled us, has he?

He's recreated us, new creation in Jesus. That's in contrast, isn't it, to verse 9. Our new life is not a result of our works, so no one may boast.

Instead, we are, verse 10, his work, which means that in Christ, we have a totally new God-given identity.

We're not our own. We're his. We didn't even contribute, so there's not even a small sense that we can boast or tell God what we are. No, he tells us who and what we are now, and he tells us we are resurrected back from the dead, saved new people, because we are in Christ, people.

[30 : 24] Our identity comes from him. We need to know that, don't we, because our sinful hearts and the devil, they tell us, don't they, that's not the real ye.

That's not who you are. You are still the child of wrath. Aren't you still that son of disobedience? Who do you think you're kidding, telling me that you are raised with Christ?

But God says, no, don't listen to that. You are who I say you are, and I say you're my workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. You are raised, saved, made new in Christ.

Friends, we need to know, don't we, what we are, so that we will know who we are. Brothers and sisters, we are his workmanship. And not our own.

And finally, why? Why are we, verse 10, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them?

[31 : 39] Paul's brought us full circle, hasn't he? When we were dead, we walked in trespasses and sins. Now we're made alive in Christ, we are made to walk in good works, which God's prepared for us to walk in.

And he's going to spend the whole second half of this letter, chapters four to six, unpacking what that walk looks like. But for now, simply see, brothers and sisters, that he's given us new life for us to live a new life.

He's given us new life for us to live a new life. And that new life isn't as we've spotted in response to what God has done for us, but it's part of what God has done for us.

We're his workmanship that he's created for good works. And so that is how we live out our identity in Christ, by walking in the way he's given us.

And so here is what we need to know. We were dead in sin, but God has raised us with Christ by grace.

[32 : 50] So now we are who we are only in Christ. And so, brothers and sisters, know who you are.

Grasp it. Pray it into your bloodstream. Do not walk out of that door and forget who you are. Tell it to one another.

remind one another what you used to be, who you are now, who has made the difference, what God has done. Above all, remind each other of the love, the power, the grace and mercy of the gospel that God has brought us from death to life, raised us, seated us, saved us through the death and resurrection of his one and only son, Jesus.

let's pray with Paul that we would know that together. Let's pray. our Father, we cannot truly grasp in our hearts the love that is beyond searching out that you have for us in Christ, that you loved us even when we were dead in our sin.

Father, how we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for making us alive with him. We thank you for his resurrection, his death in our place.

[34 : 25] And Father, we pray that by your spirit we would grasp ever more deeply these truths, that we would know and confess what we were once.

Lord, that those who as yet are not in Christ would know and confess that themselves, see their need for that resurrection of their heart, but also see the mercy and the love that you have for them. We'd grasp it by faith. Lord, we pray that you would grant us all that faith to grasp the finished work of Jesus, to know who we truly are now in him, and not to forget it.

Father, guard our hearts from what the world would tell us we are, and what our own sinful hearts tell us we are, and what the devil tells us we are.
But Lord, we pray, help us to live out of what you tell us we are now in Jesus, and therefore to walk in this new life that you have given us by grace. These things we pray in Jesus' name.
[35 : 29] Amen.