

### **Before and After!**

***<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! <sup>6</sup>He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— <sup>9</sup>not from works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.*** (Christian Standard Bible)

Ever seen those before and after pictures? Usually, they are done by some weight loss company. The before picture is someone who is obviously overweight. I wonder if they sometimes touch up the pictures to make them look worse. The after picture has the same person after he or she lost fifty pounds or more. They may be in a swim suit, or showing them wearing their "fat" jeans and how two people could be in there to contrast the before and after.

The Apostle Paul paints a before and after picture of your life. He doesn't have to doctor or exaggerate our "before" life. It's bad enough. Nor does he have to touch up or do anything to show the dramatic "after" life we have now. The before life is a life before faith in Jesus Christ. The after is our life after Jesus Christ.

We thank the Lord for inspiring Paul to remind us of what life was like before Jesus so that we praise God for the life we have in him now.

#### *I. The life we have because of Jesus.*

Grace. Why is that word so special to Christians? In order to understand it, we need to humble ourselves and admit an unpopular truth, that we are such sinful people that we can be saved only by God's grace. To do that Paul shows us a "before" picture of ourselves. ***<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses.***

Imagine a child who eats cold lunch at school. On Friday this child didn't finish all his milk and the thermos gets put back into the lunch box. The thermos wasn't shut tight and the milk spilled out in that lunch box. To top it off, that lunch box sat in the backpack all weekend long. What will happen when mom opens it on Monday morning? It would stink something terrible. The whole lunch box would smell of stinky milk. What if mom just put the new lunch in that box without cleaning it? When that child opens it at lunchtime on Monday, everyone will notice that rotten milk smell. Even the food will taste like it.

Paul says in our text we were dead in our sins. In the verses before he described it in more detail. The sinner follows the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air which is a fancy way of saying the devil. Paul said that this ruler, the devil, is at work in those who are disobedient. The sinner's ambition is to gratify his sinful nature and follow its thoughts and desires. As a result, as Paul stated, we were by nature objects of wrath. Whose wrath? God's. What is that smell in the world? It is the smell of our sins. When God opens our lunch box, he must turn his head away. The sinner is an object of his disgust and wrath. And there is nothing we can do about it. We can't perfume our sin. We can't scrub it away because it permeates our entire being. It is our nature.

***<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!*** You know how magnets work. Metal objects are attracted to them. We would like to think that we are magnets and that God is somehow attracted to us.

But that is not how it works. There is nothing about us that attracts God to us. But God, moved by mercy and love, saves us. A better picture would be that God is the magnet and we are simply steel pins. The pins don't pull the magnet to themselves. It is the magnet that pulls the pins to itself. ***<sup>8</sup>For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— <sup>9</sup>not from works, so that no one can boast.***

God doesn't cover over our sins or perfume them. He eradicates them. Jesus came to pay for our sins. Period. Sin calls for death, and so he died for them. This is grace. No one can boast or say that God saved them because of something they have done. He saves us period. And even here God is gracious. Dead in sins, we can't even believe in Jesus on our own, so he gives us faith.

Imagine you were in the village of Nain and saw that funeral procession of the only son of a widow. Let's just say that people felt sorry. One went up to the dead son and try to reason with him how it would be better for mom if he came back to life. Another even threatened him. Still the boy remains dead. Then Jesus simply tells him to get up and he does. Why did Jesus succeed where others failed? Because he is God and his godly power worked through those words, making even dead ears hear and a dead person alive again.

It is that same power that makes dead sinners alive in faith. ***<sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!*** By grace God forgives our sins because Jesus died for them. And by grace God works a miracle in our hearts as he makes us alive in Christ. Imagine Mary and Martha having dinner with Lazarus after Jesus raised him from the dead, or that widow with her

son in Nain. They were dead, but God made them alive. We were spiritually dead, but God has made us alive in Christ. That is why grace is such a wonderful word to us.

We are saved by grace. Now we live a new life by grace.

## *II. The new life we have for Christ.*

***“<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.”***

Preschool is what the name implies. It is a time when small children start the schooling process. They learn to start interacting with one another. They begin the learning process with baby steps. You can't teach them algebra, but you can start with things like writing their names. The teacher will start with one of those pieces of paper with lines on it and she carefully writes their name on the top. The student looks at his or her name and tries to copy it on the lines beneath. Is it perfect? No, but before they couldn't write their names at all, and now they can.

God has specific things he wants us to do. Like in preschool he has outlined them in his Word and now tells us, "Copy them." Of course, the best example we have is Jesus Christ. He also gave us the examples of other Christians, too, like Abraham and his faith, Paul and his zeal, Priscilla and Aquilla and their willingness to talk about Jesus at work.

But he has given us the guidance of his holy Word. Husbands and wives, you want to love and honor each other. You can get a lot of advice out there. But take the picture God gives you, for example in 1 Corinthians 13. Copy God's love in your marriage, love that never keeps a record of wrongs, love that is always faithful, kind, forgiving, which only seeks the welfare of others instead of itself. And then there is the example of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples.

And the same is true for you children and workers and bosses, you who are neighbors. Whatever your place and situation is in life, God has prepared in advance good works for you to do. Maybe you are not a brain surgeon. Maybe you scrub floors for a living or empty bed pans at the nursing home or wipe the runny noses of children. Whether great or small or somewhere in between, God has prepared good works for you. They may not be great in the world's eyes, they may even be considered demeaning, but they are great in God's eyes.

But it will be hard work. Becoming a Christian and going to heaven is no work at all; Jesus died for that and God gives it to us as a gift. But don't ever think that being a Christian is easy. It is hard work living Christian lives. It is hard work being watching out for temptation 24/7. It takes work to study the Bible. It takes work to tell if something is from the devil or from God. It is easy to love good people, but it takes work to love enemies. And forgiveness is hard. It should be easy because Jesus died for that person, too, but it is hard because we are emotional, sinful human beings who don't want to forgive.

And expect some mistakes. A preschooler's "o" sometimes comes out as a "u" and his "r" may look like a "t" or some unknown letter from some foreign language. Even our righteous acts are like filthy rags. But they are still good in God's eyes because they are done in faith in Jesus.

We have every reason to do the good has planned for us. ***“<sup>6</sup> He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*** Our salvation is so certain, Paul speaks of it in the past tense as though we are already sitting with Jesus in heaven. Our new life doesn't begin when we get to heaven. It begins now because we are going to heaven.

Been through the old family album recently? It is fun to look at pictures from twenty, thirty or fifty years ago. You look at yourself when your hair was dark, your weight was down, and you had so much energy. Now you are older; you get tired easily and you just can't do what you did back then. The Apostle Paul does the same thing here, but it is opposite. He shows us the old days, the days before we believed in Jesus Christ, and instead of being better, they were the worse days in our lives. Now things are better because God has made us alive in Christ. Before we were dead in our sins and objects of God's wrath; today we are alive in Christ and able to serve the Lord as his dear children. The difference is God's grace. We are saved by grace alone. Let's live as ones saved by grace alone. INJ Amen.