Opening Words

"You cannot sin as much as God can forgive. If it comes to a pitched battle between sin and grace, you shall not be as bad as God is good. We can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God."

27 Eph The Love That Made Us Alive

> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6] and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God has had mercy upon us because of His great love with which He loved us. Paul tells us why God is so rich in mercy, and the best way to explain it is to remind you of a story Jesus told. A widow kept coming to a judge in her village, begging for mercy from her legal opponent. The judge did not fear God or respect people. He didn't care about the woman and her problems. But she stayed after him until finally he had had enough of her and gave her what she needed for protection.

But I have some great news for you. God is not that way. God is not reluctant to help. God does not answer prayer just so that we'll be quiet and leave him alone. God is rich in mercy and he gladly shares it with people who are destitute and crying for help.

This is the mark of love and Paul says God is merciful because of His great love with which he loved us. God is not merciful because he has to be merciful. God is not merciful just because that is the "God-thing to do" but God is merciful because he is full of love.

I have been recently reading Jeremiah and am in chapters 30-33 where God gives the great promises and prophecies of the restoration of Israel and the new covenant. After so much warning, and after finally telling them that their city would be destroyed and they would be exiled to Babylon, God then floods Jeremiah's heart with prophecies of the return and of his mercy toward Israel. And why was he so merciful? It is because he was full of love for them. Listen to his words:

"Those who survive the coming destruction
will find blessings even in the barren land,
for I will give rest to the people of Israel."
[3] Long ago the LORD said to Israel:
"I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love.
With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.
[4] I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel.
You will again be happy
and dance merrily with your tambourines. 31:1-3 (NLT)

Isn't that beautiful? I have loved you with an everlasting love. Israel's sin was in time and was limited. God's love was eternal and unlimited. I have shared with you before the quote from C.H.

Spurgeon, "You cannot sin as much as God can forgive. If it comes to a pitched battle between sin and grace, you shall not be as bad as God is good. We can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God."

I hope that today you will find great encouragement in this. If your heart is troubled by your sin, I hope you will come to God for mercy through Jesus Christ. You will find him to be gracious and full of mercy because he is full of love for you. Another way of saying this is that when God shows mercy, he isn't finished. He doesn't show mercy and then leave you. God doesn't pick you up out of the mud, wash you off and then say, "try not to do that again." No, God enters a love relationship with you.

When Paul says that God had mercy upon us, he says that God was rich in mercy because of His great love with which he **loved us**. Notice in the text that he speaks of love in the past tense – the great love with which he loved us. Whenever Paul does this he means to point to the supreme expression of the love of God – of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. Paul does this in at least two others places. In Romans 8:37 he said, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." And in Ephesians 5:2 he said, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Of course, God did not love us only at the cross, but Paul wants us to focus on this supreme moment of love.

And then Paul explains this further by saying, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Paul uses that Greek word for trespassing again. Even though translators have given it a different sense in this verse, calling it a transgression rather than a trespass, it is the same word in Greek. Paul reaches back one more time to remind us of our condition – that we breached the covenant, we walked off the path, we crossed the boundary, just like Adam and Eve who reached for the fruit that was off limits. But even when we were in this condition of death before God, God made us alive together with Christ. I love the phrase "even when". In other words, God did not reach out to us in mercy and love as a result of our self reformation. If he had decided to wait, he would have waited a long time because it never would have come. Even when we were dead, he reached out to us. There was nothing to commend us to God. It was all God commending himself to us and that is why salvation is of grace.

Now I want to talk with you for a few moments about something that I believe a lot of commentators have missed on this verse. It's not that they have taught heresy but they has misapplied a doctrine to this verse that should not be applied to this verse. When Paul says that we were made alive, a lot of commentators and preachers will say that Paul is referring to regeneration. We were dead, but by Jesus Christ we were made alive or born again. Well, it is true that in Christ we have our new birth, but Paul is not talking about that in this verse and here is the reason why.

Paul says that God made us alive together *with Christ*. This is what we can call "union theology." By union theology I refer to the great truths that we died *with Christ*, were raised *with Christ* and have been enthroned *with Christ*. Many other passages of the New Testament talk about this including

the premier passage in Romans 6 which is what my book, Dead Men Rising is about. Galatians 2:20 is another of these passages as well as 2 Timothy 2:12 and Colossians 2:11-15. In these passages, Paul teaches that we have been united with Christ in his death, in his resurrection, and in his enthronement. And if we are going to understand what this means for us, we must first understand what it meant for him. The Bible tells us that Christ died to sin, was raised on the third day and 40 days later ascended into the heavens where he was enthroned. We died with Christ, were raised with Christ and were enthroned with Christ. We experience these things only because of our relationship, our union with him.

Here, in Ephesians 2, Paul tells us that God made us alive **together with Christ**. In other words, he is not pointing to the experience of regeneration, but he is pointing to the resurrection of Christ and our co-resurrection with him. Christ was not born again. He did not need to born again. So whatever being made alive meant to Christ, that must be its meaning for us in this passage. Now, again, I'm sure you understand that I am not speaking against regeneration. We do need to be born again, but I am saying that here Paul is not talking about that but talking about the resurrection of Christ and our co-resurrection with him.

So let me explain what this means. First, even though Paul does not mention our death with Christ, it is implied. The reason we are raised with Christ is that we have first died with Christ. This is the great teaching of Romans 6 that Paul takes pains to explain. He tells us in that great passage that we died with Christ to sin and were buried with him. When he says that he means that we died to the penalty of sin. We must understand our death to sin as being nothing more and nothing less than Christ's death to sin. In Romans 6:2 he says we died to sin but in Romans 6:10 he says that Christ died to sin.

Well, when Christ died, what did he die to? Did he die to some old sin nature inside of him? No, he died to the penalty of sin and so when we died with Christ, Paul did not teach, as has been erroneously taught for years, that we died to some old sin nature inside us and all our sinful impulses died with him. If only that were true. I would love to have all my sinful impulses dead. I'm sure you would too. But they are not. Instead Paul means that we died to the penalty of sin because that is what Christ died to. And our death to sin can be no greater or no less that his death to sin for our death to sin is only because of union with him. I hope you will get a copy of Dead Men Rising where I go into great detail to explain this point.

But let me move on to the resurrection part. Paul also said that we have been raised with Christ and this is what he is talking about in this passage as well. Look at the verse again, "You have been made alive together with Christ." In what way was Christ made alive? Was he regenerated? No, he was raised from the dead and entered a new relationship with his Father after the resurrection. In the same way, because we are united with him in this resurrection we now have a new relationship with God based on Christ's resurrection.

Now, am I just splitting theological hairs? No, I am not and I don't like that kind of game anyway. But I am setting the groundwork for something very important for us to understand about our

relationship with Christ. And in our next broadcast I am will share it with you as I talk about our resurrection and enthronement in Christ. I hope you'll join us as we continue to discover the wonders of the spiritual world.