

## Body Works – Grace Works

### Ephesians 2:8-10

Dead. D E A D! All of us. I am getting ahead of myself. Let me put this in context.

We are in our series called “Body Works” as we work our way through the book of Ephesians, which was Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. I want to thank Pastor Doug for putting together this sermon series. A Part of my responsibility as Lead Pastor and a part of our responsibility as a Deer Flat family is to develop leaders for the Kingdom. Pastor Doug has done an excellent job of putting this sermon series on “Body Works’ together. Today we look at Chapter 2. Vs 1-9 begin with the theme of being made alive in Christ.

But to be alive in Christ implies that we were once spiritually dead. The Apostle Paul begins chapter two by saying that we were all dead in our sins. Right away we have a problem here. Some of us know that we were dead and some of us don’t think it applies to us. Here is what I mean – some of us have been saved by grace from a very bad life and lifestyle. Our lives were full of sin and brokenness and we reached the bottom and the only place to look was up. But when we looked up we found grace and Jesus met us in our pain and sin and began to heal our hearts and lives with His forgiving presence. This is one of the reasons why our Deer Flat family will be offering Celebrate Recovery. It’s because it is our story and today by the grace of God we can celebrate the recovery that He is bringing into our lives one day at a time. Today, we know that we are sinners saved by grace.

But that is not the story for all of us. Some of us were raised in the church. There are even some here this morning who can testify that they would never “smoke, drink or chew or date girls who do!” Our lives have always been lived around the church and we have not known the brokenness that others sadly and perhaps tearfully acknowledge. We look back and say “Dead? Paul must be talking about others because that is not my story. I have been a good person all of my life.”

I used to travel for the church. Every now and then I would meet someone who would want to make sure that I was aware that they were a second or third for fourth or once in a great while a

fifth generation member of our 150 year old denominational family. It was as if their generational pedigree gave them a free pass from having to work too hard to be like Jesus today. I wanted to look at them and lovingly say that they were just as dead in their sins as any of us who have cried out to Jesus for love and forgiveness. “Dead? Not me.” And they would point to their generational pedigree as if it was a “get out of jail free” card.

But this is exactly the point that the Apostle Paul is emphasizing – at one point in our lives we were all dead. And some here this morning may still be dead in their sins. But some are saying, “Roger, are you sure. My life hasn’t been all that bad. How is it that I was dead?”

Let’s take a moment to consider 1 John 2:15-17: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” In these verses John is identifying three basic types of sin – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what we have and do. Let’s quickly look at each of them.

The cravings of sinful man. There are all kinds of cravings. You know – like the desire to live for the weekend so that we can go out and party and live it up a little. We rationalize by saying that we are not alcoholics we just enjoy the buzz that comes with our weekend partying. And the Word of God says that we are dead.

What was next? The lust of our eyes. The most obvious of these is a sexual lusting when we allow our eyes to wander. In the Old Testament, Job promised God saying that he had “made a covenant with his eyes not to look at a girl lustfully” (Job 31:1). We can admire the beauty that God created within each of us without it becoming sexual, but for many it does just that. It becomes a sexual lusting of our eyes. And the word of God says that we are dead.

And last, the boasting of what we have and do. The subtle form of this comes when we begin to boast of how good a life we have lived. I once knew of a person in his later years in life who

would love to tell people that no form of alcohol had ever touched his lips. Well ... good for you but, perhaps instead of boasting about ourselves we might want to thank God for His mercy and protection over our lives. There are those here this morning who would give almost anything to have been born into a family without alcohol. And if that is indeed our story then instead of boasting perhaps we should give God thanks and ask how we can help our neighbor who hasn't had the same blessing in life. Boasting ... the word of God says that we are dead.

Let's go back to Ephesians chapter 2. In Vs 2 Paul speaks of the "ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient". Here Paul is referring to Satan, the Devil, and his evil influence throughout our world.

In Vs 3 Paul goes on to say that at one point all of us lived among the dead "... gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath." Paul again emphasizes that at one point we were all dead to sin. But what does he mean when he says that "we were by nature objects of wrath"? Paul is saying that each of us were born with what is called original sin. Because Adam, the first man, sinned in the Garden of Eden, each of us is born with a tendency of sinful selfishness wanting self before God. And this is at the heart of why God sent Jesus to die on a cross. Jesus' death on the cross covered our sin and set free His Holy Spirit to cleanse and fill our lives. If we confess our sins the Bible says in 1 John 1:9 that Jesus "is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". Friends, it is not inevitable that we will sin in thought and word and deed every day. The continual infilling of the Spirit of God in our hearts and lives gives us the power not to have to sin. But if we sin, Jesus forgives as soon as we come to Him agreeing that our sin is wrong with a willingness to turn away from our sin.

This brings us back to Ephesians chapter 2. Vs 4 speaks of God's great love for us. God is rich in mercy and in His mercy He takes us out of our "deadness" and makes us alive in Christ. Even when we were dead in our sins – guilty as charged – God was reaching out to us with grace.

I love Vs 6-7. Perhaps some of you have heard me refer to this before. Paul gives us an awesome illustration of grace. These verses tell of how God will raise us up with Christ and seat

us with Jesus in the heavens. Now, let's keep reading and see why God does this – “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”. This is an incredible image of heaven and of God's grace.

First, I want each of us to try to imagine ourselves being seated in the heavens with Jesus. We know that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He has the seat of honor second only to God the Father Himself. But the word of God says that we too have been given a very special seat and it is somewhere near Jesus.

Now I want to ask you to think back to the worst moment in your life. The moment that you are most ashamed of. The Bible says that when Jesus forgives us He then looks at us just as if we had never sinned. The problem is that we remember our sin, and our friends remember. But the most awesome news of all is that Jesus takes our sin and throws it into what is poetically called the sea of forgetfulness. Jesus forgives us and He forgets our sin and He looks at us just as if we had never sinned. And then – are you ready for this – Jesus takes us and gives us a seat close to Him in heaven.

Here is the most awesome part of all. One day in heaven our friends happen to come by. They see how close we are sitting to Jesus. At first they stop and stare in amazement. Finally they begin to speak. It is a conversation that could go something like this: “Uh excuse me Jesus but you have Roger (or put your name in if you would like) seated kind of close to You don't you think? I mean do you remember Jesus how bad Roger sinned against You back in the day? Jesus, I know You are Lord and all, but I don't think you are remembering everything otherwise You wouldn't have Roger seated quite so close to you.”

Now, as I am listening to that I inwardly cringe because I know that they are right. I am undeserving. I have sinned and my sin was great. But I begin to hear the voice of Jesus responding to my friend. First, I hear Jesus say that He can take the worst offender – the worst sinner – and change them from the inside out. And then little by little and day by day Jesus pours His Holy Spirit into our lives helping us to be more like Him. And then Jesus takes some of the worst of us and gives us a seat close to Him. Why? Jesus says that He does this so that

the world will know and better understand the incomparable riches of His grace. And then Jesus says, “You know what, come to think of it, I can’t even remember what it was that Roger did. I have forgotten what his sin was”.

Jesus takes the worst of us. His grace begins to work in our lives. A powerful transformation begins taking place. We begin to be more and more like Jesus. And He invites us to be seated with Him so that all of the world will know His incomparably great riches and His kindness to us.

In Vs 8 Paul wants us to clearly understand that we have been saved by grace through faith. It wasn’t anything we did for ourselves. It wasn’t the good family that we were born into. There was nothing that we have done or could do to earn it. There is nothing in our salvation that we can boast about. It was a gift from God. Once dead. Now alive. Becoming like Jesus. Because of His incomparably great riches and His kindness to us.

But let’s keep going deeper into this chapter. Vs 11-22 speak to us about becoming “One in Christ”. To understand this we have to go back to the beginning. God chose from among the people of the earth the Jewish people to be His own. They were the people of God. God blessed them, delivered them when they sinned, spoke to them, lived among them. It was as if they were near to Him while the rest of us were far away from God.

In Vs 11 you see the word “Gentiles”. This word refers to anyone who was not born a Jew. There were God’s people – the Jews – and then there were the rest of us – the Gentiles. The word “Gentile” means a multitude of people from the same family. It is the same root word that use for our words ethnic and ethnicity. In the Bible it refers to those of us who were not born into God’s Hebrew family.

Vs 12 says that as Gentiles we were separated from Christ. We were excluded from citizenship in God’s family. We were foreigners to the covenants and promises that God made to His children. We were without hope and without God. We were far away from God.

Deer Flat family – there are people all around us every day who feel just like this. They feel as if they are on the outside looking in. They feel as if all of God’s promises of blessing must have been given to everybody else. Their life seems to be without hope. And if there is a God, they have no idea where and how to find Him. Deer Flat family – that is why we are here – to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus. To bring words of faith, hope and love to those who feel as if they are separated from Jesus.

This is what we read in Vs 13. Those far away have been brought near. We were once far away. But in Jesus we have been brought near. The blood of Christ allows any of us and all of us to come near to Jesus.

This theme continues in Vs 14 where we read that Jesus Himself is our peace. Jesus has destroyed the barrier and the dividing wall of hostility. What exactly is Paul referring to here? There are two aspects here that Paul is saying that Jesus has abolished. First is the separateness between the Jew and the Gentile. Now all are one and brought near to Jesus as one family. Second Paul is referring to the laws and regulations of the Old Testament. These are often referred to as the old covenant. Jesus came to establish a new covenant based on two simple yet life changing principles – love God and love your neighbor. That is it. All of the law and the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in these two commandments.

Look with me at the last part of Vs 15: “His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross, by which He put to death their hostility.” By His death on the Cross, Jesus made it possible for all of mankind to be united in Him and reconciled to God.

In Vs 17 we read that Jesus came with peace for those who were far away and for those were near. And in Jesus we both have access to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. At one point it was believed that the only ones who could come to Jesus were the members of God’s Hebrew family who believed in the Jewish faith. But in the book of Acts beginning with the story of Cornelius in chapter 10 we see that the gospel of Jesus was for all of mankind – Jew and Gentile.

In Vs 19 we read that because of this we are “no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the prophets , with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.”

The Bible repeatedly calls us to show love and mercy to the alien among us. This is a part of the reason why this is so important to the heart of God. In the United States, if you are a white English speaking person you are a part of the dominant culture. And as Americans we have an unusual influence around the world because of our economic and military strength. But Jesus is saying that in His Kingdom, there is no one person or people that have dominance. We all come before Him as one in Christ Jesus. A second reason why it is so important to the heart of God for us to show love and mercy to the alien among us is that once we were all aliens and foreigners separated from God. But Jesus came to tear down the barriers and to put an end to the hostilities that divide us. Jesus’ life and death allows all of us to know His peace regardless of how long our family has been in the church. Jesus’ life and death allows all of us to know His peace regardless of our nationality or race or the language we speak.

Vs 21 tells us that the whole building, referring to the church, is joined together as one. And as we all unite together as one church we rise to become a holy temple in the Lord. It is in our unity that we as the church become a temple in the Lord. The temple was the place of God’s presence. It was a place where God lived and where people of the earth came when they wanted to find His presence.

It is when our Deer Flat family is united in Jesus that we become more like Jesus. That is when we have the greatest blessing of His presence. That is when we have the greatest witness to our watching world. In Galatians 3:28 the Bible says that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, nor slave nor free, nor male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” As we continue to become the church that Jesus intended for us to be, we unite around Jesus. We set aside our differences about race and nationality. We set aside our differences about worship style and preference. We set aside our generational differences. Our heart’s desire is to be like Jesus and to help others be like Jesus.

Here is the capstone – in Vs 22 we read “In Him (Jesus) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit”. To understand this verse we once again have to think community. This is not a verse spoken to any of us individually. Rather, this is the Word of God spoken to us as a people, as God’s family, in community with one another. In Jesus, we too – the Deer Flat family – are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

Let me take a moment if I can to simply ask – is the presence of God felt as we come together as a Deer Flat family and as a church? There is a direct correlation between the presence of God among us and the spirit of unity among us. The more we fuss over things that really aren’t that important and the more we fuss at one another the less we look like Jesus because the less of His presence is dwelling among us. But let’s flip it back to the positive. The Word of God this morning is telling us that as we come together united in Jesus, the very presence of God through His Holy Spirit lives among us. Why will people want to come to the Deer Flat church and why will people want to be a part of the Deer Flat family? We want to offer inspiring worship and community in transformational groups and opportunities for compassionate service but these are not the most important reasons why people will want to be here. Why will people want to be here? Because when they come they sense the presence of God. God is in the house.

Let’s go back to what we read earlier. People all around us feel far from God. They feel as if they have no hope. If there is a God they have no idea where and how to find Him. But if we are being like Jesus when they are around us in worship or in community or in service, they will sense the very presence of God. And this more than anything else will bring them back. They will be drawn to a people that can help them become more like Jesus.

There is one last verse that we need to look at this morning. It is Vs 10 where Paul says that we were created to do grace works. As we are being made alive in Jesus, and as we are being made one in Jesus there is something powerful that is taking place. Vs 10 says that “we are God’s workmanship”. Don’t you love to look at beautifully designed furniture? Don’t you like to look at a hot rod that has been custom made? The Word of God says that we are God’s workmanship. Let me try to illustrate it with the story from John 20. Peter and John ran to the tomb. It was

empty. The body of Jesus was not there. They found the burial cloth “folded up by itself” (John 20:7). In the ancient Jewish tradition when a carpenter finished a project he would take his apron and fold it carefully and place it over his workmanship, over the piece he had just made. As Peter and John entered the empty tomb they found the burial cloth folded. Jesus had finished the work that His Father had given Him to do. He folded the burial cloth to symbolize that it was finished.

My friends, we are God’s workmanship. He is our Creator. His Spirit is at work in each of our lives. As we go back to Ephesians 2:10, we read that we have been created in Jesus to do good works. Have you ever heard someone ask, “What is my purpose in life?” Have you ever asked that about your own life? Here is an answer to that question. What is our purpose as a Christian? What is our purpose as a Deer Flat family? To do good. To do good works. Our purpose is to take the incomparably great riches of God’s grace and use it to do good and kind things to our neighbor and to our world.

I find it fascinating as we read the rest of this verse and realize that these good works – these grace works – have been prepared in advance by God for us to do. Those of you who helped with the playground at Chula Vista, that wasn’t your idea – that was God’s idea for how He wanted to use you. Those of you that helped two years ago in response to Hurricane Katrina – that wasn’t your idea. God planned that in advance for you. Those of you that have traveled to Haiti on a mission trip, that wasn’t your idea. God planned that in advance as a grace work that He wanted you to do.

One of the keys to a meaningful life is for us to fulfill God’s purpose for our life. And to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives, we need to ask the Spirit of God to help us be aware of the grace works that God planned out in advance for us to do. If you see a car broken down along the highway, lift a quick prayer and ask God if that is a grace work that He has planned out for you. And if you sense that it is, then by all means don’t miss your opportunity. Stop and help. As we read about the massive flooding in the Midwest along the Mississippi River – the people forced to evacuate from their homes, the businesses closed, the farm crops lost – we might want to begin to pray as a Deer Flat family and ask God if this is a grace work that He planned out in

advance for us. Maybe God will raise up a team from Deer Flat to help a family or a farmer or a church or a community rebuild.

Grace works – designed by God in advance for His people – a people made alive in Christ – a people becoming one in Christ. Let's pray. Perhaps there is someone here today who would like to be made alive in Christ. And perhaps there are many who want to ask God to show us the grace work opportunities that He has planned out just for us to do. Let's pray.