

BUT GOD

EPHESIANS 2: 4 • TV181B

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Ephesians 2:4

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.”

I read something many years ago written by a great old preacher by the name of Roland Hill. He said, “Every sermon ought to contain the three R’s.” He wasn’t talking about reading, writing, and arithmetic.

These are the three R’s:

First of all: He said, “Every sermon ought to contain ruined by the fall or what happened in the Garden.

Secondly: “Every sermon ought to contain redemption by the blood or what happened on the cross.”

Thirdly: “Every sermon ought to contain righteousness or regeneration by the Holy Spirit or what happens in the heart of a sinner when God saves him.”

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I have sort of patterned my ministry after those words, seeking if I could, to have every sermon I preach, contain the three R's, ruined, redemption, and regeneration or the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

I want you to turn today to the **Book of Ephesians chapter 2**. Let's see if we can preach this message entitled: "**BUT GOD,**" and point out the three R's. It would be a good education in the Gospel if we could learn the three R's.

Here, in **Ephesians chapter 2**; I am going to read it in a moment. The apostle Paul paints a dark picture, a very gloomy picture of our race, certainly no darker than the other writers of Scripture.

Men are sinners in God's sight. Paul doesn't paint this picture any darker than it should be or any darker than it has been painted by those who preceded him. For example; Moses wrote in **Genesis 6:5**; "*God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*"

Then, Job wrote in **chapter 15:14**; "*Behold, God puts no trust, even in his saints. Yea, the heavens are not clean in God's sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man who drinks iniquity like he drinks water.*"

Then David, in **Psalms 14**, he said in verses 2 and 3; "*The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men and he found that they are all gone aside. They are altogether become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no not one.*" David wrote again, "*Man at his best state is altogether vanity.*"

Listen to **Isaiah in 64:6**, he said; "*We are as all an unclean thing.*" Prior to this he said; "*Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*" Here he says, "*We are all as an unclean thing. All our righteousnesses (our goodness), are nothing but filthy rags in God's sight. We all do fade as the leaf: And our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away.*" Oh my, what a black picture!

Listen as Paul takes up this picture and paints it himself, he says; in **Ephesians 2:1**, the apostle says; we are dead, "*you who were dead in trespasses and sin.*"

What are trespasses? Have you ever seen a sign on the side of a fence out in the woods or out on a farm somewhere that says, "No trespassing?" That means you are not to walk on that land. Trespassing is walking on forbidden property, on forbidden ground.

That's what we are, trespassers. God said, "*Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not,*" and we did anyway. We are trespassing; we are dead in our trespasses and in our sins. "*By one man sin entered the world and death by sin, so death by sin passed upon all men. The sting of death is sin.*"

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That's what killed us; our sins killed us. Paul says that we are dead. Somebody might say, "There's a little life in everybody." No, we are dead spiritually. We are not dead mentally or dead physically, but we are dead spiritually.

God said, "*Adam; in the day that you eat of that fruit, you will die.*" He died and we died in him. That is what the Scripture says and this is what Paul is saying here; "*you who were dead, dead in your trespasses and in your sins.*"

Watch this, "*And we walked.*" That was our walk, our lives, and the bent of our wills. "*We walk according to the course of this world,*" just like all other rebels. "*All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.*"

"*We walk according to the course of this world,*" not according to God's Word and not according to God's will but according to the "*prince of the power of the air, (Satan), who now worketh in the children of disobedience.*"

We were will-worshippers and "*we had our behavior; (our conversation), in the lust of our flesh.*" We didn't care about our souls; we cared for our bodies. We were driven by greed, covetousness, materialism, passions, and ambitions. We had our behavior in the desires and passions of our flesh. That is all that we cared about.

Not only that, we were slaves to the desires of our mind. What we did not do, we thought. There are restraints on the flesh; there are all kinds of fences about the flesh that prevent men from doing what they would do.

There are no fences around the imagination. There is no restraint on the imagination. Nothing is safe and nothing is holy from the human mind and the human heart. We think it; others do it and we think it. He says, "*We were slaves to the desires of our mind.*"

You know, God looks on the heart. He said, "*You are they which justify yourselves before men but God looks on your heart.*" That which is highly esteemed among men and that which men brag on, that good reputation that we have, that men think so much of, he said, God knows your heart; God looks at your heart. "*That which is highly esteemed before men is an abomination to God because God looks on the heart.*"

Then he said, "*we were (by birth and nature) children of wrath,*" who's wrath, God's wrath." We were angry with God and God was angry with us. You might say, "I'm not angry with God." The Scripture says, "*The natural mind is enmity against God.*"

Men do not hate their god, the gods of their imagination. Men do not hate their conception of God; men hate the true and living God as He is revealed in His Word and as He is revealed in the person of His Son. It was proven by the treatment that God's Son received when He came to this earth.

He was the perfect God and the perfect man who stood on this earth in a perfect life and men spit in His face and nailed him to a cross and said; "we are not going to have you reign over us. We

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will let Caesar reign over us. We will let our Pharisees reign over us but God is not going to reign over us.”

We hated God and God was angry with us. The Scripture says, *“God is angry with the wicked. We are children of wrath even as others. He that believeth not on the Son, the wrath of God abideth on him, even as others.”*

Who are these *“others?”* Even as the angels that kept not their first estate, even as citizens of the flood of whom God said, *“I will destroy man that I have made.”* Even as the Sodomites, even as those who crucified Christ, for the Scripture says, *“there is no difference; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

Oh my, what a terrible picture! What a horrible revelation. What a hopeless situation, dead, dead in trespasses and sin, walking in the bent of our will, the direction of our lives, walking the course of this world.

We are slaves, servants, bond-servants, of the prince of the power of the air, having our conversation in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our mind, by nature, under God’s judgment, under God’s wrath. What a terrible revelation!

Is there no hope? Is there no hope? Jeremiah said there’s no hope as far as you are concerned. *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots? Neither can you do good that are accustomed to doing evil.”*

Is there no hope? Christ said, *“With men it is impossible.”* The disciples said to Him one day, *“Lord, who then can be saved?”* If that’s the condition of the best man on earth; He had just been talking about the Pharisees and their wickedness and their wretchedness before God, they said, *“who then can be saved?”*

He said, *“With men it is impossible.”* What God demands we can’t produce; what God commands we can’t obey; what justice demands we cannot present. It’s impossible *“but with God all things are possible.”*

Here is what Paul says; *“We were dead.”* He said, *“We followed the course of this world. We are children of wrath.”* Is there no hope? Is there no remedy? Is there no help?

Yes; there is good news. Look at **verse 4**: *“But God,”* but God; that is our hope. There is nothing that I can do, *“but God.”* There is something that God can do.

Shamefully, there is nothing that I wanted to do, *“but God.”* There is nothing anyone else could do, *“but God.”* That’s my hope, two little words, *“but God.”* We were *“born in sin, shapen in iniquity, brought forth speaking lies.”*

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We were estranged from the womb, with imputed unrighteousness, imparted guilt, without hope, without help, without God, and without Christ. I was at my wits-end, without strength, *“but God.”* Do you see that?

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin (even when we were in this condition), but God hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace, (not by works, by grace, not by decision), by grace are you saved.”

“He hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ in that the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

Do you want a summary of my theology? Here it is in two words: *“but God.”* I believe my friend, in the total, complete, ruin of the human race. I believe in the total depravity of the human race.

It is seen in your children. You don't have to teach your children to lie; they are born knowing how to lie. You don't have to teach your children to hate; they are born knowing how to hate.

You have to teach them to love. You have to correct them. You have to bribe them. You have to reward them. You have to do everything under the sun to get them to do the right thing. They are born knowing how to do the wrong thing.

Somebody said to me one time, “Why is it so much easier to think evil than to think well? Why is there so much easier to hate than to love? Why is it so much easier to hold a grudge than to forgive?”

It is because of the wretched condition we are in because of the birth, we were born in Adam, *“shapen in iniquity, conceived in sin, brought forth into this world, enemies of God, but God, but God.”*

Men are dead in sin, guilty before the law, unable to please God, and unwilling to bow to Christ, *“but God,”* is going to do something about it, *“but God.”* He's the only one who can. If you look to a preacher you are hopeless. If you look to a creed you are helpless, *“but God.”*

Do you want the good news in a word, just a word; here it is; here is the good news, *“but God.”* We were without hope, without help, without Christ, *“but God.”* God purposed, God planned and God determined to do something about it.

God is going to have a people. We people are not going to have a God; God is going to have a people. That's exactly right! We don't want God but He wants us. God will have His will.

Do you want the sinner's hope briefly stated; *“but God, God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”* Do you want the remedy for ruin? Here it is; the

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remedy for ruin is: The remedy is not what you have done for God it is what God has done for us, *“but God.”*

God said, *“When I passed by you, your mother was a Hittite; your father was an Amorite. In the day that you were born, your navel was not cut. You were not swaddled but you were cast out into the open field in your blood, polluted in your blood, helpless and hopeless.”*

“None eye pitied thee to do thee any good. None eye looked your way. No one cared. You were there for the beast to devour and the birds to pick the flesh from your bones. You were helpless in yourself and hopeless in yourself.”

“I passed by you and it was a time of love. I saw you polluted in your blood. I saw you and I said unto you; live. I spread my skirt over you and I covered your nakedness. I washed your blood away.”

He said, *“I raised you up and I put a crown on your head and I put a ring on your finger. I put earrings in your ears and your breasts were fashioned and your hair grew and you became beautiful. Your beauty was my beauty and my comeliness.”*

There you are, there you are, in Adam, dead in trespasses and sin. You are hopeless and helpless. *“None eye pitied thee”* in your blood, in your filth, in your corruption, in your depravity, in your deadness, in your grave of iniquity, unwilling and unable, and God came by, *“but God.”* Do you see? He said, *“I saw you just like you were, and I loved you anyway.” But God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners.”*

You might say, “Preacher; I don’t like that picture of men.” I don’t like it either but it is so. I don’t like iniquity; I don’t like corruption; I don’t like the open field of pollution either, but it is so.

You are not going to make it go away by denying it. You are not going to make it go away by not preaching it. You are not going to make it go away by refusing to believe it. It is so and God says that it is so.

“There is none that doeth good, none, no not one.” You can trace these words all the way through the Scriptures. This theme goes from **Genesis 1:1**. Look at Adam after he had taken the forbidden fruit at the insistence of his wife Eve, and at the temptation of Satan.

He had taken that forbidden fruit and he had eaten it. He knew fear. He had never known fear. He knew shame. He knew hate, he knew self-righteousness and all of these things. He covered himself and ran and hid from God. Foolishness!

Adam was a brilliant man. Here is cringing and cowering in the bushes, hiding from God. Can you imagine that, the omnipresent God? What a fool Adam!

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That is what sin does; it made a fool out of all of us. God said, “*Where are you Adam?*” He said, “*I was afraid and I hid my self.*” God said, “*What have you done?*” He said, “*I have eaten the fruit.*” God said, “*You are dead.*”

No hope Adam; you are dead. You are separated from God, dead, but God, but God. He said, “I will send my Son. I will send *the seed of woman.*”

You see; in that darkness, “*but God*” gave life. In that death, “*but God*” gave life. In that helplessness, “*but God*” announced the victory.

Then you come to the flood, God is going to destroy the whole world, “*but Noah found grace in the eyes of God.*”

How about when Israel was down in Egypt in bondage? They didn’t have a sword to fight with. They didn’t have a leader to lead them. They didn’t have an organization. They didn’t have an army; they didn’t have anything, “*but God*” sent a Moses.

You might say, “Well; I sure am glad that Israel decided to come out of there.” Israel didn’t decide to do anything. They would be there yet if it hadn’t been for God.

Just like you and me; we would still be in our iniquity if it hadn’t been for God, “*but God.*” That is what I am saying. Your salvation is not what you have done for yourself or for God; your salvation is what God in grace through Christ did for you.

Look at Israel standing in front of the Red Sea; there’s the water in front of them, the impassable ocean. The mountains reared up on both sides and the Egyptian army with all of its power and armaments and the weapons coming behind them.

They said, “We are going to die right here,” but God opened the Red sea. “*But God;*” it is always “*but God.*” It is always God who moves in mercy toward the sinner.

You see, “*salvation is of the Lord.*” He planned it, He purposed it, and He executed it in the person of His Son. He applies it to the heart of the sinner. He sustains it by His grace. He will perfect it in His own good time. He will make all of his children like Jesus Christ.

You know most religious people never weary of talking about what they have done for God, what they have given up for Jesus, and what they have done for themselves. “*Lord; have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not cast out devils in thy name? Have we not done many wonderful works in thy name?*”

They never weary about talking about what they have done. “*Lord; I fast twice a week and give alms of all that I possess and I tithe my income.*” They never weary of talking about what they have done.

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The apostle Paul doesn't talk about what he has done. He said, "*I was dead in sin,*" dead, dead, dead. "I walked according to the course of this world. I followed the prince of the power of the air. I walked in a satanic way."

"I fulfilled the lust of my flesh and the desires of my mind (the pride of my life)." I was under a just sentence and condemnation. I was lying in the open field polluted in my blood, "*but God, but God!*"

That's my theology. That's good news because He is the only one who can do anything about this mess we are in. "*But God,*" what about God? Let's read on:

It says, "*But God was rich in mercy.*" You know, our guilt is higher than the mountains and is deeper than the sea. I will tell you this; God is so rich (rich in what?) "*God is rich in mercy.*"

Ask Mary Magdalene about the riches of his mercy, seven devils living in one woman and our Lord Jesus Christ was rich in mercy to her.

Ask Saul of Tarsus who was wrapped up in his religious hatred, his religious tradition, in his religious pride. Oh what an arrogant, haughty, proud, religionist he was! He was a legalist and a moralist.

He said, "*Considering the law I was blameless.*" Arrogance and haughtiness; God hates it worse than anything. There are seven things God hates, the first of which is pride.

Ask Saul of Tarsus about the riches of God's grace. Saul persecuted our Lord's church; he put them in prison. He held them unto death. He held the coats of those who stoned the first Christian martyr.

He stood there and watched him die and didn't lift his voice in protest. Ask him about the riches of God's mercy.

Ask the woman at the well. She was married five times and was living with a man who was not her husband. She was the talk of the town. She was hiding, seeking her way to the well at high noon. Ask her about the riches of his mercy.

Or, the thief on the cross, that out-cast that the out-cast cast out. They took him outside the city wall and nailed him to a tree. Ask him about the riches of God's mercy, "*but God who is rich in mercy.*" That's what I am trying to preach.

I am saying that our God is "*plenteous in redemption.*" I am saying that our God "*delights to show mercy.*" I am saying that "*he is able, willing to save to the uttermost, them that come to God by him.*"

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Listen to me! Your sins will never keep you from Christ. Your righteousness will and your goodness will and your religion and tradition will. That is what kept the Pharisees from Christ, their righteousness and traditions.

“He is the friend of sinners. He delights to show mercy. He came to save sinners.” Your sins won’t keep you from Christ. “Oh; I’m too great of a sinner!” Come on; *“though your sins be as scarlet I will make them white as snow.”*

“Though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Your sins will never keep you out of heaven but your righteousness will and your goodness will. *“Christ died for the ungodly.”* That is what the Scripture says.

I will tell you what will keep you out of heaven, it is your false claim to righteousness, your unwillingness to lay hold upon Jesus Christ.” That will bar heaven’s door. Your sins won’t keep you out. *“He delights to show mercy.”*

The hymn writer said:

**“Come ye sinners
Poor and needy
Weak and wounded
Sick and sore.**

**For Jesus ready stands to save you
(came to save you, died to save you)
Full of pity, love, and power.**

**Don’t let conscience make you linger
Nor a fitness fondly dream
All the fitness Christ requireth
Is just to feel your need of him.”**

God is rich in mercy! “Not the righteous, not the righteous sinners, Jesus came to save.” Have you learned it? He is rich in mercy and delights to show mercy. He is always ready to show mercy.

Look at the next line: *“But God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us;”* we didn’t love God, we loved ourselves. Do you want to see man’s hatred for God? Do you really want to see man’s hatred for God?

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God sent His son into this world, the perfect, God-man. His lips never spoke an evil word. His mind never thought an evil thought. His hand never reached out except in goodness and grace to lift somebody's burden or to heal somebody's sickness or to feed somebody's hunger.

The Lord Jesus Christ is perfect before God and men; yet, they despised Him and rejected Him. *"He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief."* They turned him over to soldiers who persecuted Him and mocked Him and wounded him.

They spit in His face and nailed Him to a cross. They stood around and laughed while He died. No; we didn't love God; *"but God, for his great love wherewith he loved us. Herein is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and gave his son as a propitiation for our sins."*

The hymn writer wrote it this way:

**"Could we with ink the ocean fill?
And were the skies of parchment made
And every stalk on earth a quill,
Every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain that ocean dry
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky."**

"Preacher; you don't praise men at all." There is nothing about men to praise. "You don't see any dignity in the flesh at all." I see depravity in the flesh. "But you don't give men any credit for their works." If they had any I would but there is nothing about men to praise and our works are works of iniquity.

Any grace that we have is God's grace. Any love is God's love. Any fruit is God's fruit; that is what the Scripture says. *"Of him are you in Christ Jesus."* That is how I got that. *"Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption that as it is written; he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."*

That's hard but true, truth is always exacting and demanding and always hard, unchanging. There is nothing good in us, *"but God; even when we were dead in sin, he hath quickened us together with Christ."*

Do you know anything about representation? Adam was our representative; *"in Adam we die."* Christ is our representative; in Christ we live. *"In Adam we die and in Christ we are made alive."*

We lived in Christ the perfect life. We obeyed the law in Christ. We went to the cross and died in Christ under the penalty and wrath of God's judgment. When God Almighty raised Christ from the dead he raised us from the dead.

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“We were dead; but God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead, raised us with Christ; (and that’s not all); and seated us with Christ in the heavenlies that in the ages to come he might show (show off to the whole universe) the riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus!”