

But God Various Texts

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved

They may be the two most important words in the Bible. They not only explain the Gospel, but the Bible. They also explain everything that exists.

How big are these words?

We were dead (1)....but God made us alive (5)

This is the difference God makes. It is not just good or bad, light or darkness, it is Heaven or Hell, forever.

To better understand the importance of the text we are memorizing, I thought we'd look at those two words, "But God" throughout Scripture. But first, our text -

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, 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 coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

First: Our Problem – vs 1-3 – We were dead in trespasses and sins and following Satan, were disobedient to God. This made us objects of divine wrath.

Gospel: If someone tells you about how to become a Christian but they omit God's wrath, they aren't telling you the whole story. Without sin and God's wrath, there is no *reason* for salvation. With sin and God's wrath, there is every *need* for salvation.

This is how I was going to start the sermon today: *"I want to tell you a story. When I am finished, you may be glad you heard it. Or you may be sorry. Some of you will be happy. Others angry. But nothing changes the story. Not you or me. Not if you love it or hate it. You cannot wish it any truer. You cannot hope it untrue. It is the one story that rules them all. The truest story. The most beautiful story. You will either love or hate it. Accept it or reject it. And that will change you. That will change everything. Forever. Consider this your warning. You may want to leave now. But it will be better for you if you don't."*

Our problem, seen or unseen, believed or unbelieved, is that we are in sin debt under God's wrath.

Second: Our (Only) Hope – God's *rich* mercy and *great* love makes us alive with Christ, saving us by grace and seating us alongside Jesus

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast unmeasured, boundless, free.*

Third: His Reason – 7 – The immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness in Jesus

Fourth: The Result – 8-9 – We are saved by grace through faith, not anything we do. It is the gift of God.

Fifth: The Purpose – 10 – To be God's poem (GR/*poiema*) of good works in Jesus.

The all-important order is:

Death – Salvation – Works

And it all because of those two little words, "*But God.*" What does that look like, elsewhere in the Bible?

First: Creation

How important are those two words, "*But God?*" Except for those two words, there would be nothing.

Everything you see, know and encounter exists because of those two words. Every tree, every mountain, every grass, every raindrop, all because of God. More, every pew, every microphone, every car, house, etc. Everything that is, is created out of what God has created. We are borrowers. We are not really creators, just sub-creators. Everything that is, is dependent on those two words, "*But God.*"

First, there was nothing....and then... "*But God...*"

Second: The Fall

Genesis 3:3 - *but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'*"

As we all know, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God; hence things like, Covid-19, and the recent battles in the Middle East.

Genesis 3:9 - *But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*

This, friends, is salvation, not that we are looking for God but God is looking for us.

[Note: The first time God is referred to as “Lord God” is Gen 2:4 - the **LORD God** made the earth and the heavens.” When creation is completed, Moses wants Israel – and us – to know that God is “Lord” of it all, having the right to establish right vs wrong, and mete punishment for disobedience, etc.)].

Genesis 6:11-13 – *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

Wait? If God destroyed the earth, how are we here?

Genesis 8:1 - But God remembered Noah...

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals God as a ‘divine Interferer.’

Third: Israel

It isn’t just that God creates everything we see and enjoy. It isn’t just that God saves us from everlasting separation from him (See Gen 3:22-24). Just as God created Adam and Eve for fellowship with him,

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 - *The LORD did not love you and choose you because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the smallest nation on earth. **But the LORD** loved you and wanted to keep the promise that he made to your ancestors. That is why he saved you by his great might and set you free from slavery to the king of Egypt. (That sounds just like Eph 2)*

Fourth: The Cross

- a) Incarnation - **John 1:18** - *No one has ever seen God, **but God** the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*
- b) Resurrection - **Acts 2:24** - ***But God** raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*
- c) Salvation - **Romans 5:8** – ***but God** shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 Corinthians 1:27 - ***But God** chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

Fifth: The Church

Ephesians 2:4 - *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*

This is one of the sometimes-hard parts about Christianity. There is no such thing as lone-ranger Christianity. I know that it sometimes feels easier to ‘go it alone,’ but it isn’t best. Anyone who tries to convince you otherwise isn’t thinking in your best interests.

For every person who rubs you wrong, you rub someone wrong. For every person who offends you, you offend someone. For every person who wrongs you, you wrong someone. For every hypocrite you see, someone sees you. That’s the nature of the Fall. We are all sinners being saved by God’s grace.

Three tenses of salvation:

We have been saved from the penalty of sin. Eph 2:8-9

We are being saved from the power of sin. 1 Cor 1:18; 2:15

We will be saved from the presence of sin. Ro 8:29-30

Until Heaven, we are going to misstep into each other’s lane. And yet, God, who knows best, and always does best, has seen fit for us to travel together.

Sixth: Heaven

Like the creation point, there is no “But God” for this except to say that our salvation ends in Heaven.

Seventh: In the Interim

Every Christian has ‘but God’ moments...

a) God is working ‘all things’ for our good

Genesis 50:20 - Joseph could say that his brothers **“*[You] intended to harm [me], but God intended it for good...*”**

God Moves in A Mysterious Way

- William Cowper

*God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill;
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the LORD by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.*

b) God strengthens us for life

Psalm 73:26 - *My flesh and my heart may fail, **but God** is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

c) God continues to share his love with us

Psalm 86:15 - ***But you, O Lord,** are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

The Washerwoman's Song
*In a very humble cot,
In a rather quiet spot,
In the suds and in the soap,
Worked a woman full of hope;
Working, singing, all alone;
In a sort of undertone.*

*"With the Savior for a friend,
He will keep me to the end;"*

*Not in sorrow nor in glee
Working all day long was she,
As her children three or four,
Played around her on the floor;
But in monotones the song
She was humming all day long;*

*“With the Savior for a friend,
He will keep me to the end.”*

*It's a song I do not sing,
For I scarce believe a thing
Of the stories that are told
Of the miracles of old;
But I know that her belief
Is the anecdote for grief,*

*And that Christ will be her friend
Who will keep her to the end.*

*Just a trifle lonesome she,
Just as poor as poor could be;
But her spirits always rose
Like the bubbles in the clothes,
And, though widowed and alone,
Cheered her with the monotone,*

*Of a Savior for a friend
Who would keep her to the end.*

*I have seen her rub and scrub,
On the washboard in the tub,
While the baby, sopped in suds,
Rolled and tumbled in the duds;
Or was paddling in the pools,
With old scissors stuck in spools;*

*She still humming of her friend
Who would keep her to the end.*

*Human hopes and human creeds
Have their root in human needs:
And I would not wish to strip
From that washerwoman's lip
Any song that she can sing.*

Any hope that song could bring;

*For the woman has a friend
Who will keep her to the end.*

adapted from “The Washerwoman’s Song,” by Eugene Ware

d) God works the impossible

e) Matthew 19:26 – Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, **but with God** all things are possible.

f) God is faithful in all circumstances of life

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; **but God** is faithful...

Conclusion:

“**But,**” you say, ...my life....” Ah, yes. Your life. Our lives. They often don’t go well.

We are disappointed. We are misunderstood. We are not appreciated. We are hurt. We get sick. We lose jobs, friends, and loved ones. We die. We And where is God?

You may remember that only one book in the Bible doesn’t speak the name of God, Esther. But is God in the book of Esther? Oh yes. You’ve read it, and you know that the invisible, omnipresent God who creates and saves, also sustains. He keeps us.

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
In the night season and all the day long.
- God Leads Us Along by George A. Young*

All’s well, that ends well. If it isn’t well, it isn’t the end.
Because in the end, all will be well.

Community Groups

- 1 – Recite Ephesians 2:1-10 together
- 2 – What about this verse is the most meaningful to you?
- 3 – Is there anything about the text you don’t understand?
- 4 – How does Paul define our problem in this text?

- 5 – What is our only hope?
- 6 – Why does God act toward us as he does?
- 7 – How does the text define grace?
- 8 – What place do works have in our salvation?
- 9 – In your own words, explain the three tenses of salvation.
- 10 – What is your favorite, “But God” moment in the Bible?
- 11 – What is your favorite, “But God” moment in your life?
- 12 – How do we explain the times when it seems like there is no “But God” intervention in the world or in our lives?