

The True Everlasting Experience

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 May 2016

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] I want to preach on the subject of salvation.

! So, you have your Bibles open there to Ephesians chapter 2, and I'm going to read the first ten verses of this chapter.

And you, he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air and spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath or children deserving wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. And raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 41] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

All right, so part of that chapter, of course, especially verses 8 and 9, should be pretty familiar to most of us. In fact, I dare say that a number of us in this room this morning memorized those verses.

And if you have ever been through a, you know, a teaching on how to share your faith, a method of soul winning, then you have memorized that verse.

So you're very familiar with it. For by grace you've been saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. So we know those two verses.

[2 : 42] But as we think about that text, and as I kind of introduce us and kind of help us in preparing our thoughts about this passage and what Paul really is teaching in this chapter, I think we should possibly admit that today in America.

And I guess, you know, this past week I've been reminded of that more profoundly. In America today, we live in, I think what I could characterize as a Christian culture.

I think we still have a kind of Christian culture in America or cultural Christianity or Christianized kind of culture, whichever way you want to define it.

And what I mean is a place where, a country where most people living in this country profess to be Christians.

They say they are Christians. Now, I would admit to you that that is becoming less and less true in our nation, in our culture.

[3 : 57] In fact, this kind of cultural Christianity is very quickly just dissolving right before our very eyes. It's about gone, really, in many sectors of our nation.

And yet, still, and even polls that are taken reveal this, that the majority of people in America, if asked, will say, I'm a Christian.

I'm born again. Every few years, polls are taken. And the polls reveal what we might take as good news.

And the polls, even the most recent ones, reveal that better than 50% of the people in our nation say they are born again, or they would identify with that, or they believe in being born again.

Over 50%. And we could take that as good news, and yet here's the bad news, in spite of the statistic revealed by the poll.

[4 : 58] We still have crime on the increase, drug addiction, alcoholism, immorality. Now, we've always had these things, but these things are intensifying. Abortion, pornography, homosexuality. In fact, our nation is right now held hostage by homosexuality. And that's what we're seeing in our nation today.

We continue to see these things on the increase in our country. We even see these things in the church, even churches that are buying into some of these philosophies, these immoral philosophies.

And we're seeing the church in America declining as well. Not every church, but the church by and large in America has either plateaued or is declining.

And so what does this tell us when we think about it? Well, I think simply this. There's a huge difference between what many people call Christianity or calling Christianity and what they are really experiencing in their lives.

[6 : 07] Huge gap, huge disparity between those two things. And listen, we could go up and down the streets of the neighborhoods all around this church, as we have, and we could ask just one question.

Are you a Christian? And you know what most people would say? Yes. Yes, I'm a Christian. And yet, very few of them attend any church, any church in town, on any given Sunday.

Many of them have never even darkened the door of a church. And if they have, it's been a long time ago, when they were kids, perhaps. And if they have recently, it was at Christmas time or Easter time, you know.

I mean, that's just a reality. And these are those who would say, I'm a Christian. You can number me among Christians. I know I'm going to heaven when I die. And most have never really served in any capacity within the church, never given a dime to the Lord's work through the church, and most have never, certainly never, shared their faith in Jesus Christ with someone else.

And listen, we find the same contradiction in the church, within the church. I mean, let's just think about it. Our membership as a church numbers near the 800 mark.

[7 : 27] Did you know that? I'm talking about our total membership. I mean, people who have been on the roll for a long, long time. And that's pretty typical of most Baptist churches. We never want to take them off, you know.

The number's up to 800. Where are they? And as most churches, we divide our membership from kind of the total membership to the active membership, and it numbers around 250.

Where are they most Sundays? The Southern Baptist Convention boasts of, you know, a membership of anywhere from 16, 17 million people.

That's huge, isn't it? And yet, as I heard one man say, if J. Edgar Hoover or the FBI were still alive, he couldn't find most of them. And so what's the deal here?

You know, really all of this, I think, causes us to ask a simple question. Just what do we mean when we talk about conversion, being born again, being a Christian?

[8 : 36] What do we mean by that? Well, what does our text this morning tell us about it? Well, I think it tells us at least three things. And so I want to get right into that.

Here's the first one. First of all, true conversion, this true everlasting experience called salvation, begins with an inward transformation.

That's where it begins. And there is no reality to a person's profession of faith in Christ if there's never been this inward transformation.

That's where it all begins. Look at verse 1 again. And you he made alive. He made alive. Who were what?

Dead. Dead in trespasses and sins. He and you he made alive. I really like the King James version there.

[9 : 41] And you hath he quickened. Some of you have the King James out there. Quickened. But it means the same thing. Made alive. And look down at verses 4 and 5 again.

But God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were what? Dead. Dead in trespasses.

Dead in sins. And by the way, we should understand the word dead in the sense of everything that word means in a metaphoric sense. We're dead. And you know that dead people can't do anything. I mean, they can't talk. They can't move. They can't breathe. They can't. They're inanimate. You were dead in sins. You were that.

He has what? Made us alive. There it is again. Made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

[10:39] So you see, it's very simple. It's not vague in any way. And it's also all-inclusive. Everyone, every person from the very beginning, from their birth, is dead.

Everyone is dead. And again, dead in all. Did you understand about the word dead? Dead in trespasses and sins. That's how we began. That's how we continue to be until, until what? We're made alive by the Holy Spirit. This inward transformation. Conversion, salvation, regeneration, which is how it all begins.

This work, this is work of the Holy Spirit of God. Again, we speak of it as being regenerated to begin with. That's the meaning of, behind the word born again.

Born again. Regenerated. That's the beginning of this work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, you remember, said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, You must be born again.

[11:43] Remember, that's what he said to him. He said, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Can't even see it. Unless one is born again. Jesus further said to Nicodemus, That which is born of the flesh is flesh. And that which is born of the Spirit, that's with a capital S, Holy Spirit.

Born of the Holy Spirit is spirit. So you see, to be saved, to be regenerated, to be saved, to be converted, one must be born of the Spirit.

Born again. Born from above. It is this inward transformation that takes place in the person's heart and life, and it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

That's how it all begins. And so Jesus is saying, No one comes into the kingdom of God, No one even can see the kingdom of God, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

[12:49] Matter of fact, Salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. No person can know he or she is a sinner, apart from the Holy Spirit convicting.

Did you know that? You know, you say, well, everybody knows that they've sinned. Well, that's different from saying that you are a sinner. Knowing that you are a sinner. No one can know that you are a sinner.

No one can know that you are a sinner. In the sense, in all the sense that that means, and the weight of that, apart from the convicting of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit.

No person can do anything about that sin, unless the Holy Spirit works His transforming power in their lives. And no one can respond to the saving grace of God through faith.

No one can respond to the gospel through faith, apart from the Holy Spirit of God. Verse 8, back in our passage, again, the most familiar part of the chapter. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

[13:59] That is, both the grace and the faith are not your own doing. Now, that's not just good theology. That's good grammar. That's what the passage means grammatically.

Both the grace and the faith are not of your own doing. Rather, what? It is the gift of God. It is the gift of God. So, we talk about the Christian life, you know, as being a changed life, don't we?

And it is, isn't it? Or it should be. And if it's real, it will be. That's something we'll talk about here in just a moment. It is a changed life.

We can certainly speak of the Christian life as a change. Conversion is a change. The very word conversion suggests something that has changed. But actually, the Christian life is more than that. Salvation is more than that. It is an exchange to life. An exchange to life. It's something old is replaced by something new. I mean, when you go back to Walmart with something defective and you turn it in, they don't just fix it.

[15:16] They give you a new one, hopefully. If they don't, then you might want to go shop at Kmart. Sorry, Jeannie. But it's an exchange.

It's not something that's just being fixed or just changed from something it was and maybe something it lacked to add to that, to change it, to make it better, to make it more real.

That exists, but Christianity is more than that. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5 or 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, you know this passage.

If anyone is in Christ, you're saved. You're truly a Christian. He or she is a what? You know? New creation. Something brand new.

Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. And so Jesus did not come to do repair work on a broken down life.

[16:20] Jesus did not come to, you know, put a new patch on an old, worn-out garment. He didn't come to put new wine in an old, wine skin.

The Bible teaches about what happens to that. No, He didn't. He came to bring something new to you and me. A new life. In fact, literally speaking, Jesus gives His life in exchange for your old sinful life.

It's an exchange. It's not just simply a change. And, you know, some people are living under the mistaking idea. I meet these people all the time. And they're out there where you're working. And even in your family. And even some of your friends. And they have this mistaken idea that all you have to do to be saved or converted is to kind of reform some of your old bad habits. You know, kind of change, you know, from this kind of sinfulness and stop that kind of stuff and reform your life. You know, to clean up your act.

[17:31] To turn over a new leaf. And all those other kind of cliches. And they have that idea. And if you'll do that, then you'll be acceptable to God. And He, because He's a gracious and good God, is going to grant you salvation.

Because, you know, you've tried to do better. And you're working on it. And you're very sincere about it. That's what a lot of people believe. There are even some who profess to be Christians who are attending churches who believe that.

Now, if you were asked to, they were asked to articulate what they believe, they wouldn't say it that way. But in the way they act, in the way they live, and where their confidence has been placed, that's what they believe.

That I just have to do better. And then God will accept me. But I'm here to tell you that if that's all that you do, and that's all you've done, then you're in big trouble.

Deep trouble. I mean, you can clean up your life all you want to, but it won't make you one bit closer to God. As a matter of fact, if that's what you're trusting in, not only are you trusting in the wrong thing, not only are you wrong about that, but you're in deep trouble with God about that.

[18:49] You're in deep trouble. If you think reformation is it, just reforming your life, if you think cleaning up your life is going to do it, and just get you in solid with God, you're not only wrong about that, but you are in deep trouble.

Deep trouble. Someone has said, you know, you can take a pig out of the pig pen. In fact, the Bible uses this illusion, this metaphor.

You can take the pig out of the pig pen. You can scrub him down real good and make him squeaky clean and then buy the most expensive perfume on the market and literally bathe him with it.

And when you're done, where's he going? Back to the pig pen. He'll go right back where he was. And why? Because he's still a pig.

Nothing has changed that. He's still a pig. And we wonder why so many people who claim to have had this everlasting experience, this conversion experience with Christ, still live like a pig with so much pig slop in their lives.

[20:09] And the reason is really quite obvious. There's still pig present. But when the Holy Spirit does his work in us, affecting this inward transformation, we become new creations.

New creatures. Not perfect creatures. Certainly not sinless creatures, but new creatures. Who now have a different outlook on things.

Who now have a different affection and desire. Now certainly we still grapple with that old flesh that's going to be there until the resurrection.

But we have a new desire, a new love, a new affection. We have a desire to follow Christ. We now have a new desire to follow the things of the Spirit and to obey the Word of God and live out the Word of God and honor God with our lives.

We have, as a believer, because of that inward transformation, we now have this desire in our lives. And it comes through this inward transformation. So reformation won't do it.

[21:16] Good works won't do it. It's the work of the Holy Spirit of God. For by grace you're saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is what?

The gift of God. The gift of God. Not of works. Lest anyone should boast. You get to heaven because of your own goodness.

No. All right, let me give you a second truth about this true everlasting experience called salvation. First, an inward transformation. That's where it begins. It's the work of God.

And then second, an outward demonstration. An outward demonstration. You know, there is a verse 10 that follows the well-known verses 8 and 9.

Right? Don't forget about verse 10. Don't leave that out. I mean, yes, certainly. By grace you've been saved through faith and that not of yourself.

[22 : 17] Absolutely. It's the gift of God. That's what verse 8 says. Yes. Certainly. Not of yourselves. And yes, I would say salvation is not of works.

Paul said, lest anyone should boast. Yes, absolutely. Not of works. Not of yourself. It's not of works. And yes, even going into the first part of verse 10, we are, what?

His workmanship. Not our workmanship. Not the church's workmanship. Not your parents' workmanship. His workmanship. We are His workmanship.

But don't leave out the rest of verse 10. For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus.

What? For good works. For good works.

Which, by the way, He goes on to say, God prepared beforehand. Beforehand that we should walk in them. That's what He saved us for.

[23 : 19] To walk in those good works. He prepared that for us. You know, there will be. There will be some outward demonstration of the reality or the working of the Holy Spirit done on the inside.

The inward transformation. There will be. Someone has said that when Jesus comes into a life, He always leaves a footprint. James, you think about James and a lot of people claim that James and Paul are in contradiction with one another about this faith and works business.

But in reality, James is saying the same thing as Paul is saying from a little different angle, but he is really being more pointed about exactly the same thing Paul is talking about.

Very pointed about it. In fact, in James chapter 2 in verse 14, listen to what he says. What does it profit, my brethren? I mean, what good is it?

What value is it? If someone says he has faith. Now notice that very carefully. Says he has faith. What kind of faith?

[24 : 35] He says he has true faith. What good is it? What's the value of it? What does it profit anyone who says, says, that is his testimony is that he has the true faith, but does not have works?

What good is that? And then he asks this question, can faith, that is that kind of faith, the kind of faith he professes to have, can that faith, that workless faith, save him?

And the answer that James is looking for is no. No. It's implied. No, it can't save him. Not that kind of faith. That workless faith.

And James further says in verse 17, faith by itself, and faith is all alone. If it does not have works, it's what?

Dead. It's dead. Worthless. So we could really say a workless faith is a worthless faith.

[25 : 44] This is what James is teaching. Being very pointed about it. In fact, it becomes even more pointed when we get to verse 20 of this chapter. But do you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

I mean, it couldn't be more pointed than that. Faith without works is dead. And just to make sure that we get it, he ends the chapter in verse 26 by saying, for as the body without the spirit is dead, and we know that's true, don't we?

Spirit gone, the body's dead. That's true. And so, James is saying, for in the same way that the body is dead without the spirit, he says, so faith without works is dead.

The first part of that's true, the second part of that's true. Faith without works is dead. And so you see, true faith works. It works, or it's not true faith.

as true faith demonstrates itself in many, many, many, many ways. We're not working, of course, towards salvation.

[26 : 57] We're working from salvation. Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2, verse 12, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, he says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

He's not talking about working toward it, he's talking about working from it. Work it out with fear and trembling. Adrian Rogers used to say, you can't work it out until God works it in.

And when God works it in, and if God has worked it in, you will work it out. You will. In the form of righteous works. Expressing the very life of Christ in your life.

someone might ask, you know, is conversion then the end of the salvation experience? I'd say it certainly is.

It's the front end. It's on the front end of it. This conversion, this change, this exchange, it begins to demonstrate itself. It's on the very front end, and so, you know, a person cannot say, you know, I love Jesus, but I really haven't warmed up to the church yet.

[28 : 10] Don't really care much for it. You can't say that. I mean, Jesus loved the church and died for the church, and we're to love the same things Jesus loved.

You can't say, I love Jesus, but I, you know, I'd rather go fishing on Sunday. Or, a person can't say, you know, who professes to be a believer, who professes to have had that inward transformation, I love Jesus, but I don't really, I'm not really a praying person, a praying man, a praying woman.

I don't really get into this prayer thing. I'm not very good at that and don't do that much. But I love Jesus. A person can't say, you know, I love Jesus, but, you know, I don't tithe.

It's just something I don't do. It doesn't really matter. I love Jesus. Or, I love Jesus, but I don't, you know, I don't love old so-and-so.

I just can't love those kind of people. Or, that kind of person. Or, those, that particular family. I just can't love them. Or, that one who did such and such to me.

[29 : 20] You can't have that confidence. See, faith works. Faith always has an outward demonstration of the reality of that faith.

faith. You can't say, I love Jesus, but, when it comes to my life, I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to call the shots. I'm in charge of it.

So, the true everlasting experience called salvation begins where? In here. With an inward transformation, salvation, and that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

By grace, through faith. And, if that has taken place in your life, then there will be an outward demonstration.

An outward demonstration. There is no such thing as a secret saint. In fact, the biggest insult a believer could ever have would be to have a close associate, a friend, or someone to be surprised when they find out you're a Christian.

[30 : 35] Oh, I didn't know you were a Christian. What an insult. Lastly, this morning, an upward expectation.

Now, we don't begin there. You hear a lot of people want to go to heaven and say they're going to heaven. And that's really their thought, you know, I'm going to go to heaven when I die.

You don't begin there. This upward expectation is dependent upon the inward transformation that precipitates an outward demonstration and this outward demonstration is enhanced and even produced in us by this upward expectation, the expectation of heaven that one day we'll go to heaven.

I want you to look back at verse 6. It raised us up together, made us sit together, or really, literally seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come, ages after this age, he might, God might, show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Now, it's a tremendous passage of scripture. I wish we had time to just really pick it apart. What a verse. But here's what I want us to understand. You can be saved and know you're saved.

[32 : 13] And not only that, but know that you're going to go to heaven. You can know that. And so they say, no, you can't know that, you can just hope that. You never really know until you get there.

No. You know it that you're going to heaven. In fact, as I understand it, in the mind of God, I'm already seated there. It's in the present tense.

It's in the present tense. He said, and raised us up together. It's present tense. Raised us up and made us to, he seated us together.

It's present tense in the heavenly places. I'm as good as there. Not because I'm somebody.

Because of the grace of God. And the salvation that he wrought in me.

That in the mind of God, my citizenship is there. I'm a citizen of heaven. Every believer is. And I'm as good as there.

[33 : 12] I'm already seated there in the mind of God. You know, we can talk about the riches of his grace here and now in this age and praise the Lord for that. It really is what generates our worship.

The riches of his grace. But, I'm here to tell you that one of these days in the ages to come, he's going to show me the exceeding riches of his grace that I have not yet even been able and even capable of imagining.

That's the expectation, the upward expectation. So here, you know, really is the point of all of it because we're still here and so this, this is not just some pie in the sky and something that just makes us feel all warm fuzzy inside.

It has an effect upon us, this upward expectation. Because when you know you're a citizen of heaven and if you know that you're going to go there, you have that expectation and that expectation is sure, when you know you're going to go there then it will make a big difference in how you live here.

If not, then whatever you've got it's not real. It's not real. An upward expectation. We're going there one day.

[34 : 35] I don't know when it's going to be for me, for you. We have that expectation. Every believer does. Expectation of heaven. And we know in the mind of God we have a place already there for us.

In fact, in his mind we're already there. I heard a funny story about a young man who had just been hired by a local florist. And he had been hired to deliver flower arrangements.

You know, as people would order them and he would deliver them. And he was young, inexperienced, immature, hadn't quite learned everything. It was on his very first day he was given the task, the assignment, to deliver two flower arrangements.

One of them was to be delivered to a grand opening for a new bank. The other one was to be delivered to a funeral home for a funeral that day.

Well, poor fella got the deliveries mixed up. And so, that morning when the bank opened and the customers were coming in, new potential depositors, they saw this beautiful flower arrangement and this banner on the front of it that said, may you rest in peace.

[35 : 54] Not exactly what you want at a grand opening of a bank. Doesn't really engender a lot of confidence in potential depositors. But at the funeral home, as the family and friends were filing by the open casket saying one last goodbye to their loved one, they noticed a very extravagant spray of flowers there and a golden banner over the front of it and it said, good luck at your new location.

Actually, that's very appropriate. You see, I have a new location coming. Right? It's in my future. I don't know when it's going to be or when I'm going. But I have a new location coming. I have that expectation. My expectation is heaven. May come today.

Who knows when? And all of us hopefully have that expectation. not just simply based upon, you know, this emotional desire.

You know, the streets of gold and mansions. But based upon the reality in our lives, in our hearts.

[37 : 28] A reality that was accomplished by the grace of God as the Holy Spirit transformed us, regenerated us. saved us, converted us.

A new location. That's our expectation. Is that your expectation? Have you given that very much thought? That is your expectation if you have experienced, genuinely experienced, the inward transformation?

And are experiencing daily the outward demonstration of that? Without those things, you have no warrant to believe that you are a Christian.

Thank you.