



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Little Word Makes a Big Difference

TIM PAULEY

EPHESIANS 2:1-7

JUNE 17, 2014

Tim Pauley / PO Box 58403, Charleston, WV 25358 / 304.767.8430 / tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

All of you who work with West Virginia government understand how the meaning of small words can have a great impact on the outcome and implementation of legislation. Some of you were around for the Sunday hunting bill passed in 2001 where the understanding of just a couple of words dramatically affected the final result of that law.

As we read and study the Bible we find examples of how little words can make a big difference. One of the greatest illustrations are the two simple words, “But God...”¹ The Bible writers used these words to highlight God’s grace in providing us salvation and working in our lives. One writer said that if we remember these two words, understand them, and live by them daily, they will transform our lives. There are a number of places where the scripture uses “But God...” to point us to all that He has done for us.² We will only look at one that demonstrates our need of salvation that is provided for us through Jesus Christ.

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ **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. **Ephesians 2:1-7***

Consider the powerful meaning in the little word “But”:

But / conjunction / (but): 1) Used to introduce something contrasting with what has already been mentioned. 2) Nevertheless; however. 3) On the contrary; in contrast. ³

We quickly notice the great contrast between verses 1-3 and 4-7. The life of the unbeliever is characterized by sin, hopelessness, and death while the life of the believer is full of grace, hope and life. The difference is the “But God” found in verse 4. On the one side of this phrase, we find our sinfulness and our hopeless condition. However, on the other side of this phrase we find the hope and life because of what God has done for us.

OUR DREADFUL CONDITION APART FROM JESUS CHRIST

In this letter to the church at Ephesus Paul is writing to believers, to those who have repented and put their faith in Jesus Christ. However, he is reminding them of their condition before they trusted Him. This is our condition on the one side of the “But God...” statement found in verse 4. We should certainly be struck by the dreadful condition described in verses 1-7 as well as in the following verses.

- Dead in trespasses and sins (v 1)
- Following the course of the world, the Devil, and a spirit of disobedience (v 2)
- Living in the lusts of the flesh (v 3)
- Indulging the desires of the body and of the mind (v 3)
- By nature children of wrath (v 3)
- Separated from the people of God and from Christ (vv 11–12)
- Strangers to God’s covenants (v 12)
- Without hope, without God (v 12)
- Strangers and aliens in this world (v 19)

This does not mean that every one of us were as wicked as we could possibly be living in the depths of depravity. It does mean that every one of us has sinned against a Holy God. In the first three chapters of Romans Paul lays out how every person is in this sinful condition without Christ. The atheist who rejects God, the moral person, and even religious folk are all lost apart from Him.

BIBLE STUDIES

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY: **TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 7:30 AM**, BRIDGEPORT CONFERENCE CENTER

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If the passage ended there, our condition would be sad indeed. The Bible teaches us that in this condition we are helpless to find forgiveness and reconciliation with God on our own. Nothing can change the first condition into the second except God. However, in verse 4, we have our marvelous phrase, “**But God...**” This points us to how God acts and intervenes to provide a way for us to be right with Him.

OUR CONDITION REQUIRES GOD TO WORK ON OUR BEHALF

“*Dead in trespasses and sins...*” “*No hope and without God in the world...*” Yet God provided a way to give us hope and life. He did this by sending His Son to live a perfect life and suffer and die for our sin. He did not do so because of anything deserving in us but because of His rich mercy and great love. If you read on in verses 8-9 we see that it is only by grace through faith (vs. 8) It is not by works, not by anything we might do to earn His favor (vs. 9). When we repent and trust Christ, our lives – our eternal destinies are changed so that we gain the characteristics found on the other side of the “**But God...**”

OUR BLESSED CONDITION IN CHRIST

Consider the blessed condition of those who have trusted Christ:

- Recipients of God’s mercy and love, and of the peace of Christ (v 4, 14)
- Made alive, and made a part of the people of God (v 5, 13)
- Raised with Christ (v 6)
- Seated with Christ in the heavenly places (v 6)
- Recipients of God’s grace and kindness (v 7)
- Reconciled to God (v 16)
- No hostility between God and man (v 16)
- Access in the Spirit to God the Father (v 18)
- Citizens and members of God’s house (v 19)

What a difference! We could spend hours digging into the depths of the blessings described here. Let us just simply take note of the great contrast presented here. Let us wonder at the dramatic transformation – all because of the “**But God...**”

CONCLUSION

Have you experienced the change expressed in that simple little phrase, “**But God...**” found in Ephesians 2:4?

This study encapsulates the heart of what we call the gospel. This is the good news of how God provided salvation for sinful people through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. If you are already a follower of Christ, you might read this and feel this study is important for unbeliever, geared for those who do not yet follow Christ. Remember though that Paul penned these words to believers. He was writing to those who had already repented and trusted Christ.

In verses of Ephesians 2 Paul urges the believers to **remember** their lost, dreadful condition before they trusted Christ. “*...Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*” This would lead them to love and cherish Christ more as they remembered what He had done for them

Those of us who have followed Christ for awhile tend to forget the plight of our condition before we trusted Christ. This allows us to take our salvation for granted. This may cause us to become self-righteous, caustic, and critical of those who do not yet follow Him.

If we ever forget our great need for a Savior, then we will not love and cherish God as we should. If we remember it is only because of the “**But God...**” – only because of the grace and mercy HE has shown us – then we will love and cherish Him because of all He has done for us. And we will have great compassion and burden for those who do not yet know Christ.

***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)...*

¹ The theme for this study was adapted from “But God...” by Casey Lutes. Cruciform Press. 2010.

² Genesis 8:1; Romans 5:6-8; Acts 13:30; and 1 Corinthians 1:27 are just a few of the passages where this phrase is used.

³ Lute, Casey. “But God...” *The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel*. (p. 7). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.