

BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

“BUT GOD—”

IN the second chapter of Ephesians the inspired writer sets before us a marvelous contrast. In the first three verses he describes our wretched state apart from the grace of God. He piles one phrase upon another to picture our lost and undone condition. We were “**dead in trespasses and sins**”; we walked “**according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**”; we “**had our conversation** (lit., manner of life) **in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind**”; we “**were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.**”

Can you imagine a more formidable array of words, a more terrible stacking of expressions to declare the state of mortal man apart from redeeming grace? Now if the writer had stopped there, if no more could be said, if we were left shut up in those dismal phrases, then life would be but another name for death and earth but the anteroom to hell.

But verse four opens with two words that spell the difference between life and death, between sin and salvation, between heaven and hell: “**But God—**”!

Sin was black, *but God* came in and God is light;
Satan was powerful *but God* came in, and God is almighty!
Man was lost, *but God* came in and God found him!
Man was under wrath, *but God* came in and God is love!

The course of history revolves around these precious words.

- There was a day when the earth was without form and void, *but God* said, “**Let there be light,**” and there was light.
- There was a day when “**the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,**” *but God* chose Noah and gave the race a new start.
- There was a day when again men forgot God and walked by sight, *but God* called Abraham to set out not knowing whither he went, looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

- There was a day when the chosen people languished under Egyptian bondage, *but God* called Moses to endure as seeing Him who is invisible.
- There was a day when the backsliding people hung their harps on willows in foreign exile, *but God* raised up Ezekiel and Daniel.
- There was a day when it seemed that heaven had ceased speaking to earth, *but God* returned on the banks of Jordan to thunder through the voice of John the Baptist.

And then there was the day of all days when man wallowed in sin without a Saviour, groped in darkness without light, struggled in bondage without redemption, *but God* sent forth His Son to live and die and live again, the Just for the unjust, the Sinless for sinners, God for man!

Since that glad day, no matter how low the clouds have hung, no matter how dark the night, nor dreary the age, just when everything has seemed hopeless, history has always turned a corner with those blessed words, “**But God—.**”

- There came a day when the early church seemed to face an impenetrable Gentile world, *but God* struck down a rebel on the Damascus road to make Saul of Tarsus the spearhead of world evangelization.
- There came a time when the Bible was chained, and superstition took the place of the gospel, *but God* called Wycliffe and Tyndale to loosen His Word in the language of the common people.
- There came a day when ecclesiasticism threatened to choke the church and when ignorance bound millions in the clutches of the law, *but God* touched a miserable monk, worn out with trying to earn his own salvation, and Martin Luther rose in the strength of the Lord to declare, “**The just shall live by faith!**”
- Again, there came a time when the notes of free grace were lost in an age of worldliness and the church had lost the spirit of power in the lap of Delilah, *but God* woke up another groping preacher, and John Wesley warmed his heart at Luther’s fire and went out on horseback to carry the gospel to a needy world.

There never has been an age so hopeless but that just when it looked as though the devil had had the last word and hell had turned the tables on heaven, the historian has always been able to turn a new page and write at the top, “**But God—.**”

And although we live in the midst of world apostasy, the world’s Saturday night will turn into God’s good-morning, for in that blackest hour just before daylight everything may seem to be lost, *but God* is coming in the Person of His Son to receive from the world His own.

What is true in general has been true in particular in the experience of individual believers.

In the darkest hour, those who trust in the Lord have been able to turn from distress to Deity and say, “**But God—.**”

The Psalmist laments of enemies who speak evil of him, who wonder when he will die and his name perish, who say an evil disease cleaves to him. But from such a sad plight he turns to cry, “**But thou, O Lord—**” (Psalm 41:4-10).

Again, he groans in affliction: His days are consumed, his bones burned, he is like a pelican of the wilderness, an owl of the desert, a sparrow alone upon the housetop. Thus he moans over his sad state, but he turns presently to cry, “**But thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever**” (Psalm 102: 1-12).

Jeremiah pines in his Lamentation over the pitiful state of the land, in eighteen verses of pure misery (Lamentations 5: 1-18) but he turns to rejoice, crying, “**Thou, O Lord, remainest forever.**”

Micah paints a picture of times so dismal that he reminds us of Elijah under the juniper: The good man is perished; the rulers are in sinful collusion, not even friends, not even wives may be trusted. Then he turns upward with, “**Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.**” All else fails . . . *but God!*

As you look back over your life, I am sure that you have occasion to thank God for the unnumbered times when everything else had failed, *but God* came to the rescue.

Health had broken — *but God!*
Your friends had deceived you — *but God!*
Business had failed—*but God!*
Loved ones had passed away—*but God!*

And right there is the shame of our lives today, that when God has proved Himself again and again a very present help in time of trouble, we should leave Him out of our calculations and measure our undertakings without reckoning on that unseen factor—*But God*. Too often He is a last resort, and prayer is a final expedient, as with the elderly woman who in her illness was told, “You must trust God,” and who replied, “Has it come to that?”

- We “**reason**” among ourselves “**because we have no bread,**” and forget Him who spreads a table in the wilderness.
- We measure the situation by the size of the enemy and forget to say, as did King Asa, “**Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power.**”
- We decide just about how much we can or cannot do and be, and we limit it all with the old alibis, “Yes, but my family—”; “Yes, but my nerves—”; “Yes, but my circumstances—.” Why not put it the other way, “Yes, *but God!*”

“If God be for us, who can be against us?”

What if everybody has failed us so that we must say with Paul, “**No man stood with me, but all men forsook me**”? Let us move on with him and say, “**Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me**”! What if men do conspire against us? Let us say to them as did Joseph to his brethren: “**Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good!**” So may our experiences begin like the Negro spiritual, “Nobody knows de trouble I see,” but end as it ends with, “Glory, glory, hallelujah.”

Adoniram Judson caught a vision of evangelizing Burma. “Impossible,” you say. Certainly, if you leave out God.

Moody, starting to England on his first evangelistic mission, said, “I go to win ten thousand souls to Jesus Christ.” “Impossible,” do you say? Yes, . . . *but God!*

Why do we today not follow in the train of these giants of old? We are afraid—afraid to attempt great things for God and expect great things from God. Moses argued with the Almighty in such terms as these: “Yes, but I am not eloquent; yes, but they will not listen to me.” God answered, “**Say . . . I AM hath sent me unto you.**” In other words, it is as if the Lord said, “It is not a matter of who you are but of who I AM.” So in our unworthiness, let us, like Amos of old, say, “**I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son: but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the Lord took me.**” Nothing in myself . . . *but God!*

To the sinner, let this picture reveal your lost condition. Read these terrific verses in Ephesians 2:1-3 again.

- You may seem to be very much alive, *but God* says you are “**dead in trespasses and sins.**”
- You may be moral and idealistic, *but God* says you walk “**according to the course of this world.**”
- You may recognize the fact of God and His Christ, *but God* says you walk “**according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.**”
- You may seem decent and respectable and claim to be a character of integrity, but if you are without Christ, God says your manner of life is in the lusts of the flesh and mind.
- You may talk of the fatherhood of God and deny the fact of hell and judgment, *but God* says you are a child of wrath even as others.

But, thank God, the Scripture does not end there.

- Wretched may be your state and hopeless your condition, *but God* has done something about it.
- Black indeed was the night of sin, *but God* sent His Son to be the Light of the world.
- Grievous indeed was our bondage to sin, *but God* sent His Son to be our deliverer.
- Awful indeed was the guilt of sin, *but God* sent His Son to be our substitute.
- Sin has abounded, *but God* has seen to it that grace did much more abound.

And if in simple faith we turn from sin to this Saviour and receive Him, then the rest of this precious passage becomes our own: “**But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved;) and hath 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, through Christ Jesus**” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

No human merit could earn this blessing; no works of the flesh could purchase this treasure, “**for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God**” (vs. 8).

How blessed to be able to say,

- “Once I was blind, *but God* touched me.
- Once I was lost, *but God* found me.
- Once I was under wrath, *but God* loved me.
- Once I was under guilt, *but God* forgave me.
- Once I was dead, *but God* gave me life.
- Once I walked according to the course of this world, *but God* turned me and now I walk as He walked.
- Once I walked according to the prince of the power of the air, *but God* stopped me, and now I follow the Prince of peace.
- Once I had my manner of life in the lusts of the flesh and mind, *but God* gave me a new life, and Christ liveth in me.
- Once I was by nature the child of wrath, *but God* has begotten me into the family of love.”

And all of this is the free gift of grace if one will by faith in God’s Son come to that second birthday, the beginning of a new life that opens with those two precious words: “**But God . . .**”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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