

One of the things I want us to do this week is to backtrack a couple of verses and also cover verses 11 and 12. The main reason for this is that it improves the flow of what we're reading so that we're not starting on the word "*and*." The other reason is that these verses remind us that we have been buried with Christ through baptism, and that we are now circumcised in heart—each of us bearing the mark of His promise.

One of the main points Paul is making in this passage is the total depravity we all lived in before Christ. We were completely dead in our sins. It doesn't matter if we never committed "big" or what we might consider terrible sins—we were still just as dead and condemned as the most pervasive criminal. If we think there are people who needed (or still need) to be saved more than we did, we are misunderstanding just how far separated we were from God in our sinful state.

Therefore, when we consider how lost and dead we once were, we ought to be moved with compassion for those who are still trapped in sin. We can all think of people—whether we know them personally or have only heard about them—who are living in ways that are objectively wrong or even harmful to us. It's easy to see them as hopeless or as "bad people," unlike us. But the truth is, the only real difference between them and us is that we have been made alive in Christ and now walk in His light through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's not that we are so great, but that He is so great.

Therefore, when we encounter people who are difficult or who seem lost, we should be driven to pray for their souls and to thank God for saving us when we ourselves were just as enslaved to sin as they currently are.

Another point I want to make is that we often focus so much on the "before Christ" part of a testimony that we think those who were saved out of extreme sin have more exciting or dramatic stories than we do. But that's not how it should be. We should all be living lives so wholly committed to Christ—so passionate for encouraging the church and reaching the lost—that the *after Christ* part of our lives becomes the most extraordinary and compelling testimony. In fact, there is far more reason for our lives to be "exciting" and even *perplexing by worldly standards* now that we have eternal life and live under the promise of Christ's redemption.

Something that we want to remember is that the life that was given to us was only done through the death of Jesus Christ. Something that your group might want to do depending on the time that you have is read through the account of the crucifixion in Luke 23. The reason for this is that we understand that the sin that we have and still do commit is still accounted for. The debt might have been erased from our account, but it did not disappear, it was erased from our account because it had been paid from the account of Christ. Our sins were being paid on the cross and that is something we can never overstate as leaders.

Another truth we see in this passage is that Jesus not only overcame death but also overcame the tyranny of an abusive government. At the time of His death, Rome ruled nearly the entire Mediterranean world. This is why Jesus was subjected to a Roman trial to determine if He had committed any crime. When He stood before Pontius Pilate, He was declared innocent—yet despite that judgment, He was still condemned to die by the government. Jesus was wronged by governing officials who should have upheld truth and justice. But even in their injustice, He overcame them and put them to shame through His resurrection.

Therefore, while it is good and right for us to make our voices known through actions such as voting, we must not fear that the government has authority or power to overcome the Church. As Jesus said to Pilate, *“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”* Likewise, we must believe that whatever happens politically—whether in our nation or the world—is never beyond God’s control. He is the One who will ultimately judge unjust rulers and authorities and ensure that His Church will prevail.