

Corporate Christianity: Turn Arounds

Ephesians 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Few of us have probably ever heard of Stanly Hiller.¹ Before turning 20 years old, Stanly Hiller was featured in *Time* and *Life Magazines* as a boy genius.

In 1942, at age 17, young Hiller started a \$100,000 business producing gas-engined-powered toy cars out of a barn behind his parents' Berkeley home. At age 8, Stanley connected an old family washing machine engine to a home-made buggy frame and was seen driving it recklessly on neighborhood sidewalks.

As a freshman at Berkeley, Stanly Hiller became consumed with visions of vertical flight. By WW II, he was already a contractor with the U.S. military. Hiller left Berkeley after his first year. He teamed up with a draftsman, a welder, and an auto mechanic and set about designing and building a full-scale helicopter, though he had never flown nor seen one fly. But in 1944, Stanley Hiller completed the first successful helicopter flight in the western United States. Shortly after he opened one of the first full-production helicopter companies in the world.

But in 1968, Hiller marked out a different career path. Leaving behind the aeronautics field, he formed the Hiller Group, whose purpose was to revitalize companies with large asset bases not being employed effectively. For 20 years he distinguished himself as a corporate turnaround artist. Someone who acquires failing, bankrupt companies and makes them profitable again.

When asked his philosophy on acquiring and turning around a company, Hiller replied: "We roll up our sleeves and get into the companies, so we are not passive investors. I become chairman or CEO, and don't take any money until the corporate patient has a turnaround, and its shareholders realize promised returns."

This morning we are continuing our series in the book of Ephesians called Corporate Christianity. Acquisitions and turnarounds do not belong exclusively to the world of corporate deals and empire building. This morning we want to consider the turnaround story not of the decade or the millennium, but the greatest turnaround story of all of history and of all of eternity. We want to meditate on the

¹ John F. Straubel, "Stanley Hiller: Nice Guy Finishes First," *The Almanac*, May 3, 2006.

turnaround power of God as He rolls up his sleeves, gets into our lives, not passively but actively, and redeems sinners from sin, death, and the devil to give them eternal life and the hope of heaven.

As we meditate on God's acquisition and turnaround of sinners, we want to consider three facts:

- I. The corruption of man is deadly serious
- II. The character and work of God produce new life
- III. God saves and turns around sinners for His glory

And I pray that as we look together in God's word that He would glorify himself in the story of His turn-around of sinful men. (**READ Eph. 2:1-10**).

I. The Corruption of Man is deadly serious

The first thing we wish to consider is that the corruption of man is deadly serious. We are in a far more difficult situation than any financially failing company. Balance sheets and falling profit margins are not our problem. Our problem is that we are dead spiritually if we are not Christians.

We see this in the first three verses of chapter two (**READ vv. 1-3**).

Now, can you think of a more desperate condition than "dead"? Not sick, weak, fatigued, or confused... but dead! This is the biblical diagnosis of fallen man in fallen society everywhere.²

- a. Spiritual death (Define) – cut off from God who has life in Himself.

"As for you" → "all of us" (v. 3) → "like the rest" (v. 3)

Notice the progression of the references in these first three verses. The Apostle moves from "As for you," a reference to the Gentile Christians addressed by this letter, to "all of us," a reference to himself and other Jewish believers, to "like the rest," which includes all of mankind.

This desperate condition of spiritual death extends universally to all. All people either were or are dead in transgressions and sins.

² John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (IVP), p.

The condition of man is deadly serious. Verses 1-3 tell us that three enemies have conspired against us to produce this death: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The World

We lived in sin when we “followed the ways of the world” (v. 2).

Following the ways of this world is a sure route to death. The ways of the world are most consistent with disobedience to God. Here the “ways of the world” refers to the “entire social and value-system of materialism, hedonism, amoral relativism, and God-repudiating secularism.”³

The world’s ideas about relationships, children, business, beauty, sex, etc. are all corrupt and lead to death. Broad is the way that leads to destruction, as broad as the ways of the world. How we imbibed the practices of the world with no suspicion, no resistance, no reflection, no thought for the fact that the end of the world’s ways is death. We skipped merrily toward the deepest parts of hell as we followed the world.

The Devil

We were dead in sin when we “followed... the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (v. 2).

Our death in sin is also caused by our subjection to the evil “spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient,” called also “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” This is man’s age-old enemy, the devil. He is said to be “at work” in the sons of disobedience. Satan’s greatest deception has been to convince the world that he does not exist. And he is perhaps the greatest threat against man because he is an unseen spirit steadily at work. (can see his work: Bookstores)

The Flesh

We were dead in our sins when living “among the world” involves gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature.” See there in v. 3.

The temptation for many will be to chalk all of their faults up to the world’s influences and perhaps “the devil made me do it.” But this phrase, “All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts,” snatches back the veil of self-deception to reveal that the problem is not just out there but inside us as well.

³ Ibid., p.

We willingly, freely, voluntarily gave ourselves over to satisfying, bringing pleasure to the cravings of our sinful nature, which never cries enough, I'm full. Our lustful desires and our thoughts were for evil always. *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"* (Gen. 6:5). Our sin crouched at the door... lurking... waiting for an opportunity to devour us!

The world, the flesh, and the devil are powerfully active in the lives of all people.

2. In view of all this, Paul concludes: "We were by nature objects of wrath" (v. 3).

Literally, we were "children" of wrath. In v. 2 we are called the "Sons of disobedience" and in v. 3 the "children of wrath." That is our spiritual parentage. We are the still-born children of the violent marriage of disobedience and wrath.

And whose wrath did we face? We faced the wrath of the holy God of creation.

And why did we face His wrath? Because of our disobedience to Him.

We should all try to feel the profound truth and seriousness of that statement. "We were by nature children of wrath." Try to imagine what it is like for all men of all time in all places to experience the wrath of God for sin....

We are objects of His righteous, perfect, consistent, unerring, good, holy, God-exalting, account-reckoning, justice-establishing, sin-breaking soul-punishing indignation and wrath against all unrighteousness and sin.

Can you see why man needs to be saved? And beloved, what we need to be saved from... is God himself... from His wrath.

Christian

Paul pens these words to fellow Christians at the church of Ephesus to remind them of this disastrous situation, and to remind us of what we *were* (past tense). When was the last time you reflected on how deep was the hell that you were once destined for but that God saved you from?

As I meditated on this passage this week, the Lord prompted me through Paul's words to consider these verses for what they were, a personal reminder from God

of my own depravity. Here is the list of things I remembered from my life before faith in Jesus Christ:

- Lying
- Stealing
- Gossiping
- Cheating
- God-hating
- Idol-worshipping (Muslim)
- Fornicating
- Strife-causing
- Disloyal
- Promise-breaking
- Backbiting
- Greedy for money
- Arrogant
- Boastful
- Proud
- Faithless
- Drunken
- Disobedient to parents
- Swindling
- Christian-persecuting
- Woman-defrauding
- Authority-rejecting
- Envious
- Covetous
- Profane
- Lazy
- Gluttonous
- Selfish
- Hording
- Wicked
- Evil

Obviously, this is a partial list. And for each of these things, there are an innumerable number of instances that could be detailed. But the list indicates that the problem is radical—it's down to the root of our being. And this radical problem requires a radical solution.

My Non-Christian friend...

You are sitting in a room full of once-dead people... once spiritually dead in our sins. You are among friends. We once walked according to the ways of this world, were ruled by the spirit of disobedience, and acted out our sinful desires and thoughts. We were rebels against God, deserving only His wrath.

We *were* what you *are now* if you are not a believer and follower of Jesus.

But then... through the grace, mercy, love and work of God... we received a new life, true life. Which is our second point.

II. The Character and Work of God produce new life

In verse 4 we read: “*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions....*”

In this verse, we learn something about both the character of God and the work of God.

A. Character of God

Love

First of all, God is both a loving God and a merciful God. “Because of His great love for us...” (that is... for Christians). It is God’s love that compels Him to act. His wrath is hot and ready, and yet for those whom He claims as His own, He acts out of love. Not vengeance and justice which are rightly His, but love. And the greatness of His love is seen against the dark backdrop of our great sins. We were dead in trespasses and sins, following the world, the devil, and our sinful nature... and yet, He had great love for us.

Mercy

And we are told that God “is rich in mercy.” Mercy is clemency shown to the guilty. It is punishing us far less than our sins deserve. God is “rich” in this mercy. His storehouse of mercy runs over. While men chase coins and paper currency, God is a wealthy merchant of mercy. His fortunes are comprised of pure mercy, stockpiled as high as the heavens and sufficient in its stores for all. And that’s good news given our sins!

Grace

But we learn more about God’s character in this passage. God is also a God of grace. Verse 5: “... by grace you have been saved....” And again in verse 8: “it is by grace you have been saved....”

This truth keeps breaking in on Paul’s thoughts. If mercy is punishing us less than our sins deserve, grace is giving us what we positively do not deserve. It is unmerited, unearned favor. It is more than that. It is unmerited, unearned favor in the face of our demerit. Not only have we not earned God’s favor, but we have positively forfeited it, lost it because of our sin.

And how was this grace, mercy and love of God manifested?

B. The Work of God

It was manifested through the saving work of God. Look with me again at **verses 5-6 (READ)**. After reminding the Ephesians of what they were, Paul turns now to remind them of what God has done in them through Christ. Several things are noteworthy.

- We were dead in sins... *but now* God has “made us alive with Christ” through faith. (v. 5)

This is the main verb, the main action of the sentence. Actually, verses 1-7 make up one long sentence in the original, with God as its subject and “made us alive” the main verb. God has “made us alive with Christ.” “Even when we were dead in transgressions,” God made us alive; he quickened us. He imparted to us a vitality that we did not have and desperately needed. He regenerated us.

How does God do this? With Christ. Through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

Jesus proclaimed in John 5:24: *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

“As the Father has life in himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26).

This is how God has made us alive... by calling us to repent of our sins and to trust that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins when he died on the Cross.

I John 5 puts the peanut on the bottom shelf this way: *“God has given us eternal life through His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”* (I John 5:11, 12).

If you are a Christian, you have the life of God in you. You have been made alive to God with Christ. You now have an affection for God and a desire for the things of God that you did not have when you were dead in sins.

- We were once ruled by Satan... *but now* God has raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms where we rule with Christ. (v. 6)

Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so we who are with Christ are raised from the death of sin to eternal life. The cold grip of spiritual death has been loosed and we are raised like Lazarus with Christ.

The Father has “seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” We now sit next to God in heaven in Christ where, in 1:3, we are “blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ,” where also (1:20) we reside “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given” in Christ Jesus.” Once enslaved by Satan... now we rule together with the Son of God.

- We once gratified our sinful nature... *but now* we walk in good deeds prepared by God. (v. 10)

God’s work does not stop with making us alive, raising us up, and seating us with Him in Christ. In this life, too, He continues to work in us to will and do His good pleasure. Verse 10: “*We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

We are God’s workmanship – His work of art or masterpiece. The beauty we defiled and rejected when in our flesh we followed the world, God now makes us to demonstrate in life as a consequence of our new life. The language of “workmanship” and “created” calls to mind the creative power of God in Genesis 1. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. We are made new through faith in Him.

- We were once dead in our sins, separated from God... *but now* God has united us with Christ

Did you notice that in each of these things, we are said to be “with Christ” or “in Christ.” Our lives are now inextricably joined together with and in Jesus’ life. It is no longer we who live but Christ Jesus who lives in us. In Him we live, breathe, move, and have our being.

What God has accomplished in Christ Jesus – when he raised Him from the dead, exalted Him above every name that is named, and seated Him in royal session at His right hand – He has also accomplished in the believer. We share in the destiny of Christ Jesus our Lord.

This then is the picture of salvation... being made new and being united with Christ. It’s a picture of a tremendous and eternal turn-around.

APPLICATION

Verse 4 literally begins, “But God....” But God.... I am so thankful for that profound little couplet. Two three letter words make all the difference in this world and the next! Two three letter words tip us to the greatest turnaround ever completed.

This “But God” meets us at our point of deepest despair and need. It answers the accusation of our every sin. I mentioned a moment ago that I was...

- Lying and a liar (*But God who is rich in mercy...*)
- Stealing and a thief (*but God because of His great love...*)
- Gossip (*but God... who is the way, the truth and the life*)
- Cheater (*but God... who cannot lie and promises forgiveness*)
- God-hating (*but God... who is love*)
- Idol-worshipping (*but God... who alone is God*)
- Fornicating (*but God... who is holy and pure*)
- Strife-causing (*but God... who gives peace*)
- Disloyal (*but God... who never leaves us nor forsakes us*)
- Promise-breaking (*but God... who is not slack concerning his promises*)
- Backbiting (*But God... who never said a mumbling word at the Cross*)
- Greedy for money (*But God... who though He was rich became poor*)
- Arrogant, Boastful, Proud (*But God... who humbled himself to take on the flesh of man and bear my sin*)
- Faithless (*But God... who is faithful even when we are faithless*)
- Drunken (*But God... who never sleeps nor slumbers*)
- Disobedient to parents (*but God... who became my heavenly Father*)
- Swindling (*But God... who freely gave His Son for my sins*)
- Christian-persecuting (*But God... who turned Saul into the Apostle Paul*)
- Woman-defrauding (*but God... who makes us pure in Christ*)
- Authority-rejecting (*But God... who rules all things sovereignly*)
- Envious and Covetous (*But God... who will not share His glory with another*)
- Profane (*but this Holy God...*)
- Lazy, Gluttonous, Selfish and Hording (*But God... who gave us every spiritual blessing in Christ*)
- Wicked and Evil (*But God... who does not tempt any man with evil neither can He be tempted*)

I was a child of wrath, *but God...* full of grace... saves us from His wrath to come!

“Oh! The Bliss of this glorious thought, my sins not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! O my soul!”

If you are here today and you are not a Christian, we are very glad that you are here to hear this message. This message is the reversal of fortunes that God extends to you through the atonement for sin and satisfaction of His wrath accomplished through the death of His Son Jesus Christ.

Do you seriously think that there is anything or anyone else that can raise you from death to life... free you from the bondage of sin and satan... and change your desires from a love for sin to a love for God?

Look to Jesus and Jesus alone to save you. Cast your soul upon His back, rest your hopes on Him, that He may carry you into eternal life with Him.

My Non-Christian Friend...

One of the great tragedies of life is that so many people never meet this God of rich mercy because they are unwilling to admit their sins against God. They hide their eyes from the obvious truth of their sins... and try to block out of view this majestic, magnificent, merciful – richly merciful – God. Spiritual pretensions always blind men where God’s mercy is concerned.

So, we never find the mercy of God until all of our self-justifying rationalizations and our pretended ignorance of sin is exposed, viewed with wide open eyes, and we come to know that we *need* the mercy, the clemency, of God Almighty.

I wonder if you see your need of mercy this morning? And that God is the only source of enduring mercy?

Or would you rather cling to the ways of this world, “gratifying the cravings of your sinful nature,” following its lustful desires and thoughts?

Which is more attractive: the beauty of God’s love in Christ... or the grotesque, soul-destroying, death-producing sins of the flesh, the devil and the world?

Today, God sets before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Which will you choose? Choose life and blessing. Choose life and blessing by casting yourself on the mercy of God by confessing and forsaking your sins and putting your hope and

trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your souls. *Today* is the day of salvation. There may not be a tomorrow.

Christian

Consider what this loving, merciful and gracious God has done in your life. This grace of God has already come to you. Having received this grace, we now have a new life. And that life is to be characterized by several things:

1. Remember well your sins. But never think of your sins without thinking of God's character and the work of God in your life. Never think about your sins without thinking about the cross of Jesus Christ. Make every thought of your sin captive to thoughts of Jesus Christ.
2. Treat others with grace, remembering what you were. Let us be a church marked by grace, love, and mercy.
3. Remembering what you were, do the work of an evangelist.
4. You can be sure of your salvation. If you are trusting that Jesus' sacrifice paid the debt for your sins and turns away God's wrath, you may be free from doubts about salvation... our eternal life is certain because we are united with Him and sit together with Him where He is. This is the basis of our assurance... the incomparable grace of God that unites us with His Son and transports us to the heavenly realm even before this life is finished. What God has joined together, no man can put asunder!
5. Good works.

III. The New Creation of God is for His Glory

To conclude.... Why does God do this work, this miraculous work in our lives? He does it for His own glory. The new creation of God in the salvation of man is for His glory.

Verse 7 must be the most overlooked verse in this otherwise famous passage. God saves the people He loves "*in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*" God desires to reveal himself! His great aim is to be glorified in His creation by revealing himself as kind in Christ Jesus. In 1:12, Paul writes that God predestined

His chosen people *“in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.”*

And He is garnering the praise of His glory through revealing *“the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”* How do we know that the riches of God’s grace are incomparable? We know it because of what Jesus has done. And how do we know that God is kind toward us? Through Jesus Christ.

In Jesus’ death on the cross as our willing Substitute, bearing the wrath of God that should be poured out on those who are by nature “objects or children of wrath,” God is showing himself to be inexpressibly kind. His glory is displayed in the redemption of sinful men by His grace, mercy and love – by his kindness.

And this kindness... this grace of God... is wholly incompatible with any human merit, work, or boasting. See verse 8 again: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

“By grace... through faith” this glorious rescue from the wrath of God comes to us. Through faith in Jesus Christ. And even that faith is a gracious gift of God. In fact... all of salvation is of God’s grace. So Paul writes, “It is the gift of God” and “not from ourselves.” Neither is it “by works” that we have done.

And how can it be otherwise? Dead men don’t believe and they don’t work. They don’t do anything other than go on rotting in their spiritual graves.

Therefore, there is no boasting before God. What can we boast of when all that we have as Christians is given to us... when what we deserved was condemnation?

The glory of God is not to be shared with anyone or anything. God purposes “that in the coming ages,” eon after eon like wave after wave in the sea, his superlatives might be the boast of all His creation.

Now we, who are in Christ Jesus, are trophies of His mighty power and great grace. We are the fine art through which the beauty of the Savior is displayed to the world for all to see.

What is the purpose of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is why we were created. And though we ruined ourselves in sin, this is why God has

turned us around and made us one with himself through faith in Christ Jesus. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

CONCLUSION

In his lifetime, Stanley Hiller purchased a lot of companies... he completed a lot of big financial deals and turned them around. But all of that would be for nothing... if he didn't make the biggest turn-around of all eternity.

All is eternally lost and eternally woe... if he did not turn around from his sins and close the deal with Christ. If he did not see that *he* was the bankrupt company... meant to be purchased by the grace of God with the blood of Jesus... all is lost.

But Stanley Hiller has lived his life. What about you? Have you felt the rigamortis of spiritual death in sin... and called out for the grace, mercy, and love of God that gives new life?

I rejoice together with you if you have.

If you have not... you have no other business today more important than repenting from your sins and coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Talk with me after the service if that is your desire. I beg you to do so before the wrath of God comes upon you.

Let's pray.