

Uptown Church Sunday School
Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction

- As mentioned previously, the letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul around 61-62 A.D. during his imprisonment in Rome.
- P.T. O'Brien suggests that the two main themes in the book of Ephesians are "cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ."¹
 - We have seen in previous weeks that believers are united to Christ before the foundation of the world, yet their final consummation awaits them in eternity.
- Another theme that we will see in this book is that "Christ is the one in whom God choose to sum up the cosmos, He is the one that restores harmony to the universe...[Christ] is the instrument...through whom all this occurs"²
- We know that this letter was addressed primarily to the Gentiles, though we will see today that the Jews are also part of Paul's focus in this letter.
- As a broad overview, we will see in our passage today that the passage is divided into three parts: "1-3 describe the sinful condition of the readers' past and of the rest of humanity, 4-7 speak of the great love and mercy of God, who made the readers alive with Christ, and 8-10 summarizes the nature of this salvation that God has effected."³

Dead in Transgressions and Sins, 2:1-3

I. Pre-Christian past (v. 1)

A. Pre-Christian condition

- In this passage Paul is initially addressing his Gentile readers in Asia-minor, though we will see in verse 3 he addresses all people.
- Paul begins this section by describing the Gentiles pre-Christian condition. "Before God made them alive with Christ they were deeply affected by evil influences."⁴

B. You were spiritually dead

- The condition that Paul addresses is that they are spiritually dead and alienated from God.

¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 58.

² O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 59.

³ O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 154.

⁴ O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 155.

- At times Paul uses the word dead to actually mean dead, but in this case he uses the word figuratively as a way of describing the state that these Christ were in before Christ.
 - Some Christian circles tend to belittle our spiritual state before Christ. They might use illustrations like, “I was *drowning* in my sin, and Christ threw me a life-savor.” We need to see here, from the beginning that our spiritual state is dead, and we are in need of life. We need a life that we cannot give ourselves.

C. You were dead in your transgressions and sins

- We see in the passage that our dead state is a result of our transgressions and sins.
- This time of language indicates the idea that because of the sinful past of the reader, they had no hope and were far from God.

II. Influences that directed sinful lives (v. 2)

- We should note here that Paul is making a sharp distinction between their sinful, pre-Christian life and later he will remind them of their live in Christ.
- Paul is recalling their past life, not to emphasize it *per se* but to draw attention to Christ’s mighty work of salvation

A. The world

- The word that Paul uses here is sometimes translated ‘age’ but this does not seem to be the way he is using it here. He is saying that they followed the ways of this world, existing in this span of time. “‘According to the manner of this world-age’ is a way of speaking about both the spatial and temporal aspects of fallen human existence.”⁵
- The behavior of the Gentile readers before Christ was determined by the powerful influences of society’s standards, habits, and preferences, which were opposed to God and his standards.

B. The devil

- Not only are the people subject to the bondage of the world, but they are also subject to the influence of the being who rules over the hosts of evil spirits. We should take this to mean the devil. Ephesians contains more principalities and powers than any other NT letter. We see this in 4:27, 6:11 and 6:16.
- The Gentiles were following the ways of the devil. These people rejected the gospel, and disregarded God’s will. We are not saying that those who are not Christians are in some way possessed by evil spirits, but *all* who

⁵ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 159.

are outsiders of Christ do not follow the ways of the Lord, but the ways of the evil one.

- We see that the devil is at work in those who have not personally benefited from the work of Christ.

III. Inclination toward evil (v. 3)

- In verses 1-2 Paul reminds the Gentiles of their pagan existence, but now he turns to include everyone as those who were disobedient. He states now that the Jews too were among the sinful people who were in need of reconciliation.

A. We are *all* are inclined toward evil

- In this context ‘flesh’ does not stand for a person’s physical existence, but humanity in its sinfulness and rebellion against God.
 - Paul says that we ‘all once lived in the passion of our flesh,’ indicating this idea that we were corrupted even in our nature.

B. We have *all* given in to our sin.

- We should not miss that Paul includes Jews and Gentiles here in verse 3, which shows us that everyone has given in to their sins. They, and us, were all dead in our trespasses, followed the course of the world, and the evil one. We have all carried out the sinful desires, which have created a divide between the Lord and us.

C. We are objects of wrath by nature

- The term ‘by nature objects of wrath’ means that by birth, and in the very core of their beings they deserved God’s wrath. “Paul and his fellow Jews were deserving of and liable to wrath just as much as the Gentiles were.”⁶
- Paul says in Romans 5:12, “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all because all sinned.” So, if the result of one man’s trespasses led to condemnation for all human beings, because all humanity was encapsulated in that one man, then this is to say that all are *by nature* subjects of wrath.⁷ All of humanity is included in this nature.
- The wrath in view is God’s holy anger against sin. It is not some impersonal, vindictive anger of God. Further, we will see that God’s holy wrath and his love are not mutually exclusive.

Application Questions:

⁶ O’Brien, *Ephesian*, 162.

⁷ O’Brien, *Ephesian*, 163.

What if we lived our lives as if sin was really this offensive to God?
How does this change the way we view/treat non-Christians?
How does this change the way we view/treat Christians?

Because of His Mercy and Love God Made Us Alive with Christ, 2:4-7

I. God's great mercy and love (v. 4)

A. We were dead, but He made us alive with Christ

- In verse 4 God's, "Gracious initiative and sovereign action stand in wonderful contrast with the hopeless condition of fallen humanity."⁸ All men and women were objects of God's wrath BUT he had mercy on them. We were dead, but he has made us alive with Christ. We were in bondage to evil powers, but God seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms.
- We should pause for a second here to ask what it was that prompted God to save us. What is the origin of his saving grace? It is God's mercy, great love, and rich grace that caused him to save us.
- This whole paragraph emphasizes that he acted on our behalf simply because of his own gracious and merciful character.
 - My pastor in Oklahoma told a story about his professor from seminary. The professor had a routine that when he would come to passages like this he would ask the class why Jesus saved them. What was it about them that they would be chosen and not others? The answer is the God loves us because he loves us. Until we fully grasp this, we will not grasp the heart of the gospel. We were dead, but God made us alive with Christ.

B. We were in bondage to evil, but He made us alive with Christ

- We were in complete bondage to evil, but we were made alive with Christ. Our experience of salvation was totally unmerited, since we were dead in our sins, and subjected to the evils of this world.

C. We were in sin, but God is rich in mercy

- At the beginning of verse 4 we see the one who shows mercy to his people. We should see that all throughout the Bible, God is bestowing mercy on sinful people.
 - In the Old Testament, God uses a Canaanite prostitute to let Israel into the promise land. In Matthew 1, we see that Rehab is in the line of Jesus. We

⁸ O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 164.

also see that he uses sinful people like Bathsheba, a great sinner in the OT to further the line of Christ.

- Micah 7:18 reads, Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights to show mercy.” We serve a God who delights in showing mercy to his people.
- A seminary professor here in Charlotte told a story of interviewing a prospective student and asking his conversion story. The student was married seven years, and he and his wife were not Christians. She kicked him out of the house and he was living in a “sleazy, rat infested motel.” He was converted by watching a TV evangelist he what he described as a “sleazy, rat infested conversion.” The next day he went to the divorce lawyers to sign the divorce certificate, he asked to lawyers to leave the room and he shared the gospel with his wife, another sleazy, rat infested conversion. She was converted and they stayed married. In the next seven years they had 2 children and he has now accepted all call to the ministry. The Lord delights to show mercy to his people.

II. God’s rich grace (vv. 5-6)

A. God has made us alive in Christ

- “Paul’s readers have come to live with Christ, who was dead and rose again; their new life, then, is a sharing in the life which he received when he rose from the dead.”⁹
- There is a sharp contrast here between our former state, which was death, to our new state – alive with Christ.

B. We have been saved by grace

- Grace is the theological concept that most clearly expresses Paul’s understanding of Christ’s work of salvation.
- The message here that God has saved you by grace stands opposed to any idea that you saved yourself through work or merit.
 - God lavishes his grace to us by delivering us from judgment on our trespasses and sins.
- We need to see here that salvation has already been accomplished and experienced. Trey talked about this in weeks past.
 - There is the reality in eternity past, we experience it in the present, and it will continue on to the future.
 - In a sense, we were saved even when we were in our trespasses and sins. How can this be? Eph1:4, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”

9 O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 167.

C. We are raised and seated with Christ

- Verse 6 indicates to us that what God did for Christ he did at the same time for believers. Our salvation was made certain and was continued through the death and resurrection of Christ on the cross.
- We get the idea now of a present reality, as we experience new life in Christ.
- The readers participate in Christ resurrection life; we share in Christ's exaltation and consequent victory over the powers.

III. God's great kindness (v. 7)

A. His great kindness is shown in the coming age

- God's further purpose in lavishing his mercy on sinners, raising and exalting them in Christ Jesus, was that they should serve as a demonstration of his extraordinary grace for all eternity.
- The ultimately goal for salvation is the glory of God. God saves us for His good purpose and do be delighted in.

B. His great kindness is directed to us

C. His great kindness is in Christ

- In verse 4-7 Paul has gone full circle: he began by speaking of God's mercy and love as the motivation for his initiative in saving people, then Paul tells the readers that their salvation came from God's mercy, and he continues by telling them that God's mercy was to demonstrate his grace for all the ages. What God has done for those in Christ is both a present reality and a future hope. We await the final consummation of the glory of God.

Application Questions:

What would it mean to live as though our salvation was totally unmerited?

How does this change the way we view/treat non-Christians?

How does this change the way we view/treat Christians?

God's New Creation, 2:8-10

I. Saved by grace through faith (v. 8)

- In this final section we will see that God's call to those that are saved is to live a life with good works. It is not the cause of salvation, but the result

A. Saved by grace

- Paul says that you have been saved by grace through faith in order to contrast any idea of human merit.
- God's grace is the grounds for salvation. He is the initiator of our salvation, and no one can be made alive without Him.

B. Saved through faith

- Faith, then, is the means by which grace is received. It is a response to what Christ has already done for us in the work of the cross.

C. Salvation is a gift of God, not by works

- Paul adds two negatives to emphasize the divine initiative of salvation. The first one is that, "this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God."
 - This first negative refers back to faith. The point being made is that the response of faith does not come from any human source but is God's gift. He does everything in saving sinners.
- The second negative is "not a result of works."

II. We are not saved by our works (v. 9)

A. There is no room for human merit

- Salvation is not because of human initiative or good deeds. Paul is saying this in contrast to some that think they can earn their salvation. The reader may think that he has done something to earn God's grace, but he has no room to boast.

B. There is no room for human boasting

- Paul has already told to reader about their state before Christ. Every part of them was affected by sin, and they were completely depraved. Now, God has come in and offered salvation. It is impossible for the reader to turn to his behavior before he was a Christian as grounds for achieving salvation. Men and women have nothing they can bring to the living and true God.

III. Good works are the fruit of our salvation (v. 10)

A. We are His workmanship

- Here we see that we are believers at all because of God's workmanship. We are wholly dependent on God's gracious, sovereign activity for our salvation. We can apply the term workmanship directly to the new creation.

B. We are created in Christ

- This idea that we have already been created in Christ Jesus for good works shows and interplay between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet.’ The stress falls on our present lives, that we are created for good works, and we need to “work out our salvation.’ But there is also a future reality that all things will be made new on the final day.

C. God prepared them beforehand

- If God has prepared our salvation before the foundation of the world, he too had prepared our good works before hand too. Here we are talking about growing in holiness toward the Lord. All things fall under his sovereign direction and will. He has created everything in eternity past, though it is a present reality.

Application Questions:

How are we changed when understand that our salvation is by grace through faith?

Does this affect our views on evangelism?

