

A Series on Ephesians
“An Introduction to Christianity” (Ephesians 2:1-11)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on the Letter to Ephesians. We finally finished chapter 1. Wahoo! We are ready to go on to chapter 2. Chapter 1 was this amazing chapter where it started out with a rampage of praise to God, and then a rampage of prayer! First chapter, you can say is salvation from God’s view. Now, he explains salvation from the human point of view. I want to just take a broad stroke of the passage today. I am going to be sharing the essence of Christianity today. If you are here and you’ve wondered whether what Christians believe, here it is. (BTW, I’ve changed the title of the sermon)

Let’s read Ephesians 2:1-10.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In verse 1, Paul says we were dead in sins.

That means our problems can’t be solved by trying to fix ourselves. Dead people can’t fix themselves. Our problem can’t be solved by trying to be a better person, trying to reform ourselves, trying to more diligent, trying to a better dad, mom, son, wife, husband or whatever.

^a Or *our flesh*

Now, what does it mean to be dead in sins?

In **Genesis 2:16**, after God created the world, God took Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden and the Lord said to him: **“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”** And you know the story. The devil tempts them and they eat the forbidden fruit. Did they die? Yes, they did. They were separated from God, which is a spiritual death, and eventually this spiritual death led them and each of us to die physically.

Grace and I used to buy a fresh Christmas tree every year. Are fresh cut Christmas trees alive or dead? They look like they are alive. They even take water. They even smell alive. At first, you might not be able to tell any difference between trees in the forest and a cut tree. But, it’s dead! It is separated from the root, from life itself. It is just a matter of time until it dries up. One year, we got a little lazy about getting rid of the Christmas tree and we missed the garbage pickup days for the tree. So, I didn’t know how to get rid of it. So, I decided to burn it in the fireplace. Man, I almost burn down the house. It was like burning boxes of matches!

Paul is saying that we are separated from God. We decided to do our own thing. We decided to walk away from God.

One of the symptoms of separation from God is a sense of emptiness in our lives. We try to fill this emptiness with something. If only I can fall in love, if only I can marry, if only I can break into that career, if only I get a house—but even after we get them, we find that it does not satisfy us. Nothing delivers the joy it seemed to promise. Many of us avoid the sense of emptiness through busyness or denial, but at best there is just a postponement. “Nothing tastes,” said Marie Antoinette.

There are several ways to respond to this:

We can blame the things themselves – by finding fault in everyone and everything around you. You believe that a better spouse, a better career, a better boss or salary would finally yield the elusive joy. Many of the most successful people of the world are like this – bored, discontented, running from new thing to new thing, often changing counselors, mates, partners, or settings.

Or we can blame ourselves – by trying harder to live up to standards. Many people believe they have made poor choices or have failed to measure up to challenges and to achieve the things that would give them joy and satisfaction. Such people are wracked with self-doubts and tend to burn themselves out. They think, “If only I could reach my goals, then this emptiness would be gone.” But it is not so.

Or we can blame the universe itself – by giving up seeking fulfillment. This is the person who says, “Yes, when I was young I was idealistic, but at my age I have stopped howling after the moon.” This makes you become cynical, you decide to repress that part of yourself that once wanted fulfillment and joy. But you become hard, and you can feel yourself losing your humanity, compassion, and joy.

Or we can blame and recognize that it is caused by our separation from God – by seeing that the emptiness comes from your separation from God, and by seeking to be regrafted to the root.

Now, how do we form a personal relationship with God? How do we connect to the source of life, our God? We have to understand three things: (1) who you are; (2) who God is; and (3) how to respond.

(1) We have to understand who we are.

We are God’s creation. God created us and built us for a relationship with him. We belong to him, and we owe him gratitude for every breath, every moment, everything. Because humans were built to live for him (to worship), we will always try to worship something– if not God, we will choose some other object of ultimate devotion to give our lives meaning.

We are dead in transgression and sins. We have all chosen to reject God and to make our ourselves and our happiness our highest priority. Paul says, we follow “**the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.**” Instead of following the ways of God, we decided to determine our own path. It’s interesting that Paul says includes the phrase “**the ruler of the kingdom of the air.**” That’s the devil. Jesus called the devil the prince of this world. Then he says, “**All of us also lived among them at one**

time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”

He is saying two things:

One, our sins lead to spiritual bondage. To live for anything else but God leads to breakdown and decay. When a fish leaves the water, which he was built for, he is not free, but dead. Worshiping other things besides God leads to a loss of meaning. If we achieve these things, they cannot deliver satisfaction, because they were never meant to be “gods.” They were never meant to replace God. Worshiping other things besides God also leads to self-image problems. We end up defining ourselves in terms of our achievement in these things. We must have them or all is lost; so they drive us to work too hard, or they fill us with terror if they are jeopardized.

Two, we do not want to worship God and surrender ourselves to Him, yet because we are built to worship, we cling to idols, centering our lives on things that promise to give us meaning: success, relationships, influence, love, comfort, and so on.

(2) Second, we have to understand who God is:

Verse 3 talks about God’s wrath, which means God is angry at the wrong; it is holy discontent; it is his justice. Then, verse 4 says “**But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy**” The Bible says God has great love for us. God is just and loving. His active concern is for our joy and well-being. Most people love those who love them, yet God loves and seeks the good even of people who are his enemies. But because God is good and loving, he cannot tolerate evil. The opposite of love is not anger, but indifference. One person said, “**The more you love your son, the more you hate in him the liar, the drunkard, the traitor,**” (E. Gifford). To imagine God’s situation, imagine a judge who also is a father, who sits at the trial of his guilty son. A judge knows he cannot let his son go, for without justice no society can survive. How much less can a loving God merely ignore or suspend justice for us—who are loved, yet guilty of rebellion against his loving authority?

You have to understand who Jesus is. Jesus is God himself come to Earth. He first lived a perfect life, loving God with all his heart, soul, and mind, fulfilling all human obligation to God. He lived the life you owed—a perfect record. Then, instead of receiving his deserved reward (eternal life), Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins,

taking the punishment and death each of us owed. When we believe in him: 1) our sins are paid for by his death, and 2) his perfect life record is transferred to our account. So God accepts and regards us as if we have done all Christ has done.

That is why Paul says in verse 4-5: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

He reconnected us to the root. He gave us life! He made us alive with Christ. We didn't do this by self-improvement and being a good person. God did it to us and gave it to us as a gift—that's what grace means.

(3) What you must do:

Repent. There first must be an admission that you have been living as your own master, worshipping the wrong things, violating God's loving laws. “Repentance” means you ask forgiveness and turn from that stance with a willingness to live for and center on him.

Believe. Faith is transferring your trust from your own efforts to the efforts of Christ. You were relying on other things to make you acceptable, but now you consciously begin relying on what Jesus did for your acceptance with God. All you need is nothing. If you think, “God owes me something for all my efforts,” you are still on the outside.

Pray: “I see I am more flawed and sinful than I ever dared believe, but that I am even more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I turn from my old life of living for myself. I have nothing in my record to merit your approval, but I now rest in what Jesus did and ask to be accepted into God's family for his sake.”

When you make this decision, two things happen at once: 1) your accounts are cleared, your sins are wiped out permanently, you are adopted legally into God's family and 2) the Holy Spirit enters your heart and begins to change you into the character of Jesus.

I am a new creation, a new baby in Christ. (John 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17) I have peace with God, and a relationship with God. (Romans 5:1-2) The Bible promises eternal life to all who receive Christ. (1 John 5:11-13) The Holy Spirit begins to dwell in me. (Ephesians

1:13-14) I begin to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

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