

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### FOLLOWING SATAN TO FOLLOWING GOD

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

#### **Introduction**

This passage runs in the face of our culture. A generation or two ago, the culture understood the concept of sin. Today, a large portion of our culture rejects absolute truth, and consequently any concept of sin - at least at an intellectual level. Of course, this don't stop the powerful combination of the conscience and the Holy Spirit to convict the person of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8-11). Consequently, many nonbelievers have a sense of guilt, but no intellectual framework in which to understand it and thus no way to relieve that guilt of sin without explaining it away -- which is ultimately unsatisfactory.

Paul ended the last chapter by considering that the ultimate example of God's power was the resurrection of Jesus. Now Paul considers what the implications of Jesus' resurrection power are for our life starting with the concept of salvation.

#### **Dead in Transgressions and Sin**

*“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (v1)*

Paul declares that people without Christ are spiritually "dead" -- dead in transgressions and sins. Our culture today doesn't even like to use the word sin. Transgression? Transgression of what? The idea behind the word trespasses is that we have crossed a line, challenging God's boundaries. The idea behind the word sins is that we have missed a mark, the perfect standards of God.

We err if we think that dead in trespasses and sins says everything about man's lost condition. It is an error because the Bible uses many different pictures including being dead to describe the state of the unsaved man, saying he is:

- Blind (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)
- A slave to sin (Romans 6:17)
- A lover of darkness (John 3:19-20)
- Sick (Mark 2:17)
- Lost (Luke 15)
- An alien, a stranger, a foreigner (Ephesians 2:12, 2:19)
- A child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)
- Under the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13)

#### **Following Satan**

*“... in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” (vv2-3)*

At one time we lived in trespasses and sins, according to the course of this world, which is orchestrated by Satan. Satan (the prince of the power of the air) is still very much active among those in rebellion against God – the sons of disobedience.

In our deadness, we mindlessly follow the value systems of the culture around us --"the ways of this world" (NIV) or "course of this world" (KJV, NRSV, ESV). Oh, we don't admit to mindlessly following -- we follow in a very deliberate, individualistic, self-deterministic way -- but we have absorbed the self-centred, relativistic values of our culture, and can't help but express those in our lifestyles.

What is really scary, however, is that in our deadness we end up following Satan, "the ruler of the kingdom of the air," who is the great deceiver. In our deadness we lack discernment. Our lives are filled with the cravings of our sinful nature (verse 3) -- desires, lusts, thoughts, jealousy, envy, strife, selfishness, you name it -- which the Tempter inflames.

Our world lives in the myth of neutrality. We are not following, we are leading, we tell ourselves. We make our own decisions, we insist. But we are not spiritually powerful enough to lead in this unseen "heavenly realm." We end up being led, duped, victimized, usually without our even knowing it. Our lack of commitment to God in itself is a commitment -- a commitment to follow our whims, and the Tempter is a master of subverting selfish whims.

### **Children of Wrath**

Because of our surrender to the old man, the world, and the devil, we were by nature children of wrath. We rightfully deserved God's wrath and deserved it because of who we were by our heritage. The wrath of God is another of those counter-cultural concepts. We don't like judgment or judgmentalism in our relativistic society. But you can't read the Bible very long until you run smack into the judgment of the righteous God. I hate all that Old Testament judgment and hellfire and brimstone, you protest. Just give me Jesus and his love.

Have you read Jesus' teachings carefully? He talks more about hell and judgment than anyone else in the New Testament. We can't escape it. There is no dichotomy between the Old and New Testament God. Our God is a God who insists on justice and its consequent judgment. And if we try to live free of God's absolute law we become "children of wrath" like the rest of mankind.

### **Sinners by Nature**

Moreover, we are this way "by nature." The word refers to a "condition or circumstance as determined by birth, natural endowment or condition, nature, especially as inherited from one's ancestors, in contrast to status or characteristics that are acquired after birth." So, we are being punished for something that is not our fault? you might ask. No, we are being rescued from something that has overpowered our race and victimized us, and from which we cannot escape without assistance, without a Saviour.

In a court of law, is a person pronounced "not guilty" because he was ignorant of the law? No. If he was intoxicated and couldn't control his actions? No. Because he claimed he was raised in a difficult environment and shouldn't be blamed? No. Is God fair? Yes, eminently fair. When justice is fair, we lose because we sin -- wilfully at times -- against God's holy law. What we need is not justice or fairness. What we need is mercy and grace. That's all we have left to hang onto.

### **The process of reconciliation to God.**

*"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (vv4-5)*

With **but** and **because**, Paul explained God's reason behind reconciling man to Himself, and these reasons are found totally in God. The reasons are His rich mercy and His great love, which He focuses on us.

In the previous verses, Paul was talking about sin and judgment. Look at these contrasting words now:

- "God, who is rich in **mercy**."
- "God ... who **made** us **alive** with Christ."
- "It is by **grace** you have been saved."

"**Mercy**" refers to "kindness or concern expressed for someone in need, compassion, mercy, pity, clemency.

"**Grace**" means literally "favour ... a beneficent disposition toward someone, grace, gracious help, good will." It describes one's attitude toward another which is unilateral, that is, one-sided, not depending upon what another does.

Our rich-in-mercy God has come through for his people once again. This time, where we have no basis at all of deserving mercy, he has taken the judgment we deserved upon himself in order to spare us. While we were dead, he made us alive, an echo from Romans:

*"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (**Romans 5:6-8**)

He made us alive together with Christ. This is what God did to those who were dead in sin. He shared in our death so that we could share in His resurrection life. The old man is crucified, and we are new creations in Jesus with the old things passing away and all things becoming new.

### **Seated with Christ in Heavenly Realms**

*"... and raised us up together and made us sit together in the 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 in Christ Jesus."* (**vv6-7**)

This is the present position of the Christian – sitting in the heavenly places. We have a new place for living, a new arena of existence – we are not those who dwell on the earth (as Revelation often calls them), but our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We don't sit in the heavenly places **with** Christ Jesus, or at least not yet. Instead, we sit **in** the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Since our life and identity is in Christ, as He sits in heavenly places, so do we.

Now and in the future, God will continue to show the exceeding riches of His grace to us. God will never stop dealing with us on the basis of grace and will forever continue to unfold its riches to us through eternity. God's love isn't just to "get us saved," but to continue to shower us with his love and blessings forever and ever, world without end. Amen.

We started the Ephesians 2 with bad news of man's blind following of the spirit of the age -- and of Satan himself -- into spiritually-deadly "transgressions and sins" and "wrath." Not a pretty picture. But without hardly drawing a breath, Paul continues to contrast our fallen human state with our exalted grace-filled state of forgiveness and rescue, of spiritual power and authority, of long heaven-summer-days of basking in our Father's wonderful riches for us. I can't think of much better news than that!

### **Salvation By Grace Through Faith**

*"For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* (**vv8-10**)

This is probably the clearest expression of our relationship with God found anywhere in the Bible.

First, let's look at salvation, "saved." We can understand it best when we strip it for a moment of all of its religious connotations and look at its root meaning: "rescue." Salvation means rescuing someone from a situation that put them in danger or would have been fatal if they had not been removed from it. Salvation is rescuing us from our condition, spelled out earlier in Ephesians 2:1-4. Let me review it briefly for you.

- Spiritual deadness (Ephesians 2:1) is caused by transgressions and sin.
- Followers of our corrupt culture, followers of "the ways of this world" (Ephesians 2:2a).
- Followers of Satan, "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2b) as dupes, unknowing adherents to a pride and attitude toward God that has its origins in the rebellious Snake himself.
- Self-indulgent, "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:3a).
- Under Divine judgment and righteous anger (Ephesians 2:3b). God is just. He is the epitome of justice and fairness which recognizes our rebellion and spiritual treason for what it is and passes judgment on us and our sins. We are loved, but under a sentence of death.

Only when seen in stark relief against the dark backdrop of our predicament, does God's love shine with all its brilliance. Paul cannot speak of this glorious work God does without reminding us that it is a gift of grace, given to the undeserving. We are not even saved by our faith (though faith itself is not a work), but by grace through faith.

The work of salvation is God's gift. Paul's grammar here indicates that the words apply to the gift of salvation mentioned in Ephesians 2:4-8, and not directly to the faith mentioned in this verse. Yet even our faith is a gift of God. We cannot believe in Jesus unless God does a prior work in us, for we are blinded by our own deadness and by the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). But it may be asked: Is not faith the gift of God? Yes, as to the grace by which it is produced; but the grace or power to believe, and the act of believing, are two different things. Without the grace or power to believe no man ever did or can believe; but with that power the act of faith is a man's own. God never believes for any man, no more than he repents for him; the penitent, through this grace enabling him, believes for himself.

### **God's Workmanship**

God saves us not merely to save us from the wrath we rightly deserve, but also to make something beautiful of us. We are His workmanship, which translates the ancient Greek word *poiema*. The idea is that we are His beautiful poem. The Jerusalem Bible translates workmanship as "work of art." God's love is a transforming love. It meets us right where we are at, but when we receive this love it always takes us where we should be going. The love of God that saves my soul will also change my life.

### **Created in Christ Jesus for good works**

That beautiful thing God is making of us is active in good works. These are just as much a part of God's predestined plan as anything else is. These good works are valid evidence that someone is walking as one of God's chosen. God planned for us before we were even born to do special "good works." The Scripture says he "prepared beforehand" for us to do them. I take this to mean that we have been prepared in advance by having been given aptitudes, special spiritual sensitivities, unique abilities -- "spiritual gifts," if you will -- which equip or prepare us to fulfil our destiny here on earth (and, who knows, maybe in the Kingdom beyond, also).

