

Session 2

GOD IS LOVE

Ephesians 2:1-8

Memory Verse


But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!


– EPHESIANS 2:4-5, CSB



God is Love

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The Bible makes plain that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Yet, because of Jesus’ sacrificial death, God is both the just and the Justifier. (See Rom. 3:26.) The Christian’s sin-debt is cancelled and they enjoy adoption as sons and daughter of the one true and living God.

 Do you know someone who has been adopted? What responsibilities do adoptive parents take on in this process?

 How does this process help us know more about the way God loves His children?

Each state has its own adoption processes and procedures, but in many states the adoption process culminates with a courtroom hearing where a child is officially and legally made the child of the adoptive parents. During this hearing it is common for the judge to interview the parents concerning their knowledge of the meaning of adoption and their ability to provide for the child.

A common question that a judge might ask the adoptive parents at one of these hearing goes something like this: “Do you understand that this child will have equal rights and claim to your inheritance as your biological child?” These ceremonies are both joyful and solemn. They are weighty events because what is taking place is profound and life altering.

They are also pictures of grace. The child that is being adopted is grafted into a family based not on their merits, but because of the kindness, compassion, and love of the adoptive parents. The orphaned child isn't adopted because the parents hope that the child will one day become rich and pay them back. Rather, they are brought into the family because of the kindness and compassion of the father and mother.

This is a picture of what God does for His children. In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul described spiritual adoption. He made plain the fact that those who are children of God were once lifeless and hopeless. Their adoption into the family of God was a result of His graciousness, love, and mercy.

In his hymn, "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," John Newton included this verse:

*By Thee my prayers acceptance gain,
Although with sin defiled;
Satan accuses me in vain,
And I am owned a child.*

Let's look at Ephesians 2:1-8 together and consider how Christians come to be "owned a child."

Session Summary


Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, where he had previously evangelized and labored to build up the new believers. He left Timothy there to oversee the work as he continued on his travels. Paul wrote to Timothy directly to give him instructions concerning his work there. He said, "As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Throughout the letter Paul continually urged Timothy to pay careful attention to both teaching sound doctrine as well as refuting false teaching. Timothy's role as the pastor of Ephesus was primarily the ministry of teaching the Word. It is through the Word that we clearly see our need for Christ and the reality that once we are in Christ, we no longer have to perform to be accepted by God. Rather, we work out of our acceptance, not for it.

1. Sin and Death (Eph. 2:1-3)

Paul explained in his letter to Timothy that sound teaching was what Timothy had received from Paul himself and was based in the Scriptures. (See 2 Tim. 2:2,15). The content of Ephesians reveals the pattern of teaching Paul wanted Timothy to give to the Ephesians. This is the “good deposit” Paul commanded him to guard (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Ephesians 2:1-8 is the very heart of this good deposit, for it is a divinely inspired description of the work of salvation by God on behalf of man.

 What is the main idea of Ephesians 2:1-3?

The main idea of these first three verses is that man is so pervaded by sin that they are as good as dead. Paul wrote that before coming to Christ, the Ephesians were “dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1). The same can be said of Christians today. All those who are in Christ now were previously dead in their trespasses and sins. Further, we also learn from this passage that those who are not in Christ continue to be dead in their trespasses and sins.

 What does it mean to be “dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1)? What does verse 3 say about the nature of those who are in this state?

Someone who is dead in their trespasses and sins is in a hopeless situation. They are unable to get themselves out of it. They are lost, broken, and separated from God. They have no merit that warrants the favor or blessing of God. In fact, it’s just the opposite.

The text indicates that those who are dead in their sins and trespasses are under the wrath of God. The sinful condition itself is bad, but the real horror of being dead in one’s sins and trespasses is the fact that it makes a person an enemy of God. Those

who stay in their sin are God's enemies and under His wrath. This biblical truth cuts against the accepted social norm that all people are God's children and each one may find their own way toward God. The fact of the matter is God does love His children with an undiminishing, everlasting love. Many people, however, are not children of the one true and living God. It is a misconception to believe that because God created a person (as all were), they are automatically one of God's children. This simply isn't so. The Bible teaches explicitly that some people are children of the devil apart from the saving work of Christ in their lives. (See John 8:44; 1 John 3:10.)

? Application: Why is it important that we understand the sinful condition of man before we attempt to appreciate the mercy and love of God in Christ Jesus?

2. Mercy and Love (Eph. 2:4-7)

The bad news of verses 1-3 gives weight to the amazingly good news of verse 4. The bitterness of those verses makes the sweetness of verses 4-7 sweet like honey. Those who are in Christ rejoice with weeping because of the marvelous mercy and love God has shown them in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

? How has God displayed mercy to His people through Jesus?

Mercy is the withholding of deserved punishment. In this case, it is God withholding the penalty for sin, which is eternity in hell. God has shown mercy to many sinners and brought them into His family as beloved children. Those who were once His enemies are now made His friends. Those who were children of the devil have now been made children of God.

This incredible turn of events came about because "God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish

but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In other words, God extends His mercy to those who deserve His condemnation because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid the price for sin with His very own blood. In this way God is both just and the justifier. (See Rom. 3:26.) Paul wrote to Timothy, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Further, Romans 8:34 says, “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.”

How did Jesus reconcile sinners to God?

Jesus, being fully God and fully man, did what no other person is able to do. Jesus lived a life of flawless obedience to the God the Father. Jesus always did what God commanded, and He never did what God prohibited. He pleased God the Father in every way. (See Matt. 3:17.)

His perfect obedience is a wonder to behold and His excellency is more than we can name. But how does Christ’s goodness help us? In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul explained: “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:21). Holy, righteous Jesus submitted Himself to a sinner’s death and took the punishment for the sin of God’s people upon Himself. Jesus Christ, God the Son, took the wrath of God the Father toward our sin upon Himself on the cross. But that’s not all. He not only canceled the debt we owed, but He also credited our account with His righteousness so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Application: How does it make you feel to know that your salvation had to be earned but Christ earned it on your behalf because you are unable to do so?

3. Grace and Faith (Eph. 2:8)

What is grace? What is faith?

Grace is unmerited favor. In other words, grace is when a person receives a good thing that they have not earned and do not deserve. Faith is the instrument by which a lost sinner may receive the grace of God in Christ Jesus. We exhibit faith by trusting in and leaning upon the person and work of Jesus Christ without reservation.

Notice that Paul regarded both the grace of God and the faith of man as gifts: “this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.” Both salvation itself and the ability to receive it are due to God’s kindness. Paul’s point was that we don’t look to anything other than Christ as the source of our salvation, not even our faith. Charles Spurgeon said it this way: “Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee—it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument—it is Christ’s blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith.”²¹

How did God show His grace toward us in Christ?

God is just and sin must be punished. He will not hold back punishing sin. God’s justice would undoubtedly be satisfied for the sins of every man through eternal condemnation. Every person has been guilty before a holy God and their sentence of death was ready to be handed down. But everything changed when Christ appeared to intercede. The Mediator, Christ Jesus, bore sin. Read what Paul wrote to the Colossians: “You, were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your

flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him” (Col. 2:13-15).

God the Father did this for Christians so that they might be forgiven of sin through the shed blood of Christ and united to Him. Christians are blessed beyond measure. Not only has their record of sin been canceled, but also they have been adopted into God’s family and enjoy all the rights and privileges of sons and daughters. (See John 1:12.)

? Application: Where do you tend to look toward your own spiritual work (faith, baptism, church attendance, etc.) as the root of your salvation instead of to Christ?

Conclusion

Performance-based religion is a dead end. It may appeal to us and we may even be tempted to buy the product, but we must resist. Works-based righteousness is a bill of goods from the pit of hell that leads all those who subscribe to it there.

This very thing is what makes Christianity distinct from other religions practiced across the globe. All other systems of belief have at its very core the idea that people must earn the favor of God and their way into heaven. The Christian faith is different. The Scriptures teach that it is impossible for a person to gain heaven by their works. Christ promised that He would save all who would come to Him with faith and repentance. He doesn’t save them because of merit found within in them, but because of His grace.

❓ How might it shape you to meditate on the fact that God now feels no wrath whatsoever toward you even when you sin because Christ has already born that wrath? How would this make you a more joyful, thankful, loving person? Why?

❓ How should the grace that Christ has shown us compel us to love others within the church and show love toward them?

❓ Why should God's grace motivate us to tell others about Him?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Christ, the God-man, who was “tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15), now lives to make intercession for all of those who have responded to the gospel with faith and repentance. (See Heb. 7:25.)

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: As Christians proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, they call sinners to repent of sin and believe the gospel. All those who come to Christ in this way will never be cast away. (See John 6:37.)



FOR NEXT WEEK

God is Trustworthy

Main Passages

- Matthew 6:9-13

Session Outline

1. His Nearness (Matt. 6:9a,11)
2. His Holiness (Matt. 6:9b,12)
3. His Authority (Matt. 6:10,13)

Memorize

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

- Ephesians 2:4-5, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Ephesians 2:1-8
- Tuesday - John 3:16
- Wednesday - Zephaniah 3:17
- Thursday - 1 John 4:16
- Friday - 1 John 4:19
- Saturday - Psalm 86:15

References

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Morning and Evening," Spurgeon's June 28th - Morning Reading (Blue Letter Bible), accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/devotionals/me/view.cfm?Date=06%2F28&Time=both&body=1>.