

the sake of, and to the advantage of, the church that Christ reigns over the universe.

This is the first time Paul uses the word “church” in the epistle. It is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “a called-out assembly.” Most of the uses of *ekklesia* in the New Testament refer to local congregations. In this verse, however, it is the universal church—the worldwide body of all God’s children—that is meant. This was also the sense of the word when Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18).

We must be careful, however, that we do not fall into the modern trap of claiming to love the “invisible, universal church” while despising all the local manifestations of it!

V. 23 which is his body—The church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:18), just as surely as human flesh was once his body. While his body of flesh never got more than 200 miles from Jerusalem, his body of believers reaches around the world. While his body of flesh was subject to death, his body of believers cannot be stopped. The more the early martyrs were killed, the stronger the body became!

Most of Ephesians has to do with the Christian’s role as a member of Christ’s body. So much of our individual duties and our shared relationships with one another will become clear, if we can just remember that we are one body, and Jesus is the head.

the fullness of him who fills all in all—The church is the fullness of Christ in the sense that a head without a body is incomplete. Christ, who is all-sufficient, has deliberately chosen to depend upon his body of believers to accomplish his work on earth. He did not really need us to fill anything, but has chosen to work through us as his body.

Study Questions

1. Why did Paul say he had “heard of” their faith when he had spent three years in Ephesus personally?
2. How is God going to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation? In what form will it come?
3. What three specific things did Paul pray that his readers might come to know?
4. What is the greatest demonstration of God’s power in history?
5. Is the resurrection of Jesus something we accept on faith or on fact?
6. What does God’s ability to raise Jesus from the dead mean to you?
7. Have you ever been guilty of doubting God’s ability to work through you to accomplish anything for his kingdom?
8. What are several specific things a head does for a body?
9. In what way is Jesus dependent upon the church? If he is all-powerful and all-sufficient, why does he need us to labor in his kingdom on earth?

Lesson Three (2:1-10)

From Death to Life (2:1-10)

1 And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— 9 not because of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God to the rescue! Mankind was helplessly, hopelessly lost. We all walked in sin; we were all by nature children of wrath. But God chose to save us anyway! This passage, which contrasts our guilt with God's grace, is surely one of the most beautiful sections of all scripture.

V. 1 And you he made alive—In the Greek text this phrase does not actually occur until the fifth verse. Read the first three verses without this phrase and you will feel the impact of guilt and hopelessness. In an age which no longer believes God to be capable of righteous wrath against sinners, we would do well to remind ourselves of the fact that we were all children of wrath—saved only by God's grace.

when you were dead through the trespasses and sins—Death is separation. Physical death is separation from family and friends on earth; spiritual death is separation from God. When a man willfully sins, defying the commands of God, his sin cuts him off from his Creator. Our most holy God cannot tolerate sin or sinners in his presence. So long as men are still stained by sin's guiltiness, they are cut off from God—spiritually dead. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

"Trespasses" are literally "missteps which fall off to the side." It is a failure to stay within the prescribed path. In the scriptures trespasses usually refer to individual acts of wrongdoing.

"Sin" is literally "missing the mark." The picture is that of a marksman who takes aim, but misses his target. In the scriptures sin is usually more than just a single incident of wrongdoing. It is a state into which man falls; it is a way of life. "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

V. 2 in which you once walked—It was not just an isolated failure here or there in their lives; it was their whole way of life. In the scriptures the word "walk" is used to describe the continuous action of a life-style. In this case their way of life was the way of death.

Following the course of this world—To follow the course of this world means to live according to the present, temporary scheme of things. It means to ignore the prospect of eternity and heaven, and to live entirely for "the here and now."

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he

who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

following the prince of the power of the air—The prince of this world is Satan (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). It is against him and all his hosts that Christians must do battle (Eph. 6:10-12). When men sin and disobey God, they transfer their allegiance to Satan.

The power of "the air" has been understood in many ways. The early church fathers thought of storms and atmospheric disturbances. Others have taken "the air" as astrological powers, or as a synonym for "heavenly places" (see 6:12), or as the air we breathe, which is then said to be the dwelling place of demons.

Actually, the best way to understand this sentence grammatically is to take "the air" as the same as "the spirit" which is in apposition to it. This would be the resultant meaning: "Satan is the prince of the power of the air—and that air is the rebellious spirit or attitude working in men."

the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience—The spirit, as used here, is an attitude or way of thinking. This evil seems to pervade humanity. "Sons of disobedience" is simply another way of saying "men who disobey."

V. 3 Among these we all once lived—No man has the right to look down his nose at a sinner. Despite what the Pharisees thought of themselves, "there is none righteous, no, not one," (Rom. 3:10). Before we can properly appreciate how God so graciously saved us, we have to admit how lost we were!

in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind—The purest essence of sin is not some horrible, unthinkable atrocity. It is living for self. It is obeying my own desires and caring only what I want for myself. Satan does not have to convince us to commit murder to have us in his clutches; he has only to convince us to live for self. This is why the very first thing a man must do to follow Jesus is to deny self (Matt. 16:24).

Furthermore, it is not only the body which has sinful passions. The desires of mind can be just as bad—and perhaps worse, since they are less conspicuous. The mind that demands its own way in matters of anger, pride, resentment, revenge, etc. is working for the devil (see 4:26-27).

and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind—when Paul said we were "by nature" children who deserved God's wrath, he by no means meant we were born that way. Man is not born totally depraved, as some would teach. He is born a free moral agent, capable of both good and evil. Men have all chosen evil at one time or another, thus becoming

guilty of sin. Notice all the indictments against men which led to this verdict:

1. You were dead through trespasses and sins (v. 1).
2. You walked in them (v. 2)
3. You followed the course of this world.
4. You followed the prince of the power of the air.
5. You shared the attitude (spirit) of the sons of disobedience.
6. We all lived according to the passions of our flesh (v. 3).
7. We followed the desires of body and mind.

It was not God's doing, but our own, that made us "by nature children of wrath." Where does the Bible make God responsible for the sinful choices that we made for ourselves?

V. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy—Two of the most beautiful words in all the Bible are these: "But God." (See Acts 13:30; Phil. 2:27; and 1 Cor. 10:13). "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)

There is a dramatic contrast in verses three and four between God's wrath and God's mercy. It is hard to avoid going to an extreme with one or the other. In earlier days people were gripped with terror as they heard Jonathan Edwards preach "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In modern times people are often so presumptuous of God's mercy that they say, "It doesn't matter if you sin. God is so nice that he won't send anybody to hell, anyway." God has wrath for his enemies and love for his children, and one cannot be properly understood without the other. Furthermore, he offers us a choice. We may choose to be either his enemies or his children.

out of the great love with which he loved us—The unique quality of God's love (*agape* in Gk.) is that he loves even when love is not deserved and the object of his love is very unlovely. His love does not count the cost or calculate its own profit. (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10). The "children of wrath" have become children of mercy and love.

V. 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses—Paul here picks up on the line of thought from the first three verses so that he can bring it to its grand conclusion: Even though we were helplessly, hopelessly dead, God made us alive with Christ!

made us alive together with Christ—Just as God raised his Son from physical death in the preceding verses (1:19-23), so now he raises his human children from spiritual death. Just as the Son now lives forever and reigns triumphantly, so should the children continue

in spiritual life and triumph over the old life of human failure. What we were, we are no longer—by God's grace.

(by grace you have been saved)—Like a composer of a beautiful symphony, Paul has been building to a beautiful crescendo. He started with the low, dark tones of death and then introduced the bright note of God's mercy. The climax he reaches in verse eight is the theme of his symphony, and he cannot help but insert a preview of it here: By grace you have been saved!

V. 6 and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him—What a beautiful parallel there is between Christ's resurrection and our own! Just as God did for Jesus physically, he does for us spiritually:

1. He made us alive with Christ.
2. He raised us up with him.
3. He made us sit with him.

in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus—In Christ and his church we are participants in the eternal sphere of being. We should live our lives in constant awareness of the cosmic struggle going on around us (6:12).

V. 7 that in the coming ages—As the years roll into eternity, throughout countless ages God will continue to work blessings for his beloved children.

he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace—Not only is the greatness of God's power "immeasurable"; so also is his grace. God shows himself to have an earnest desire to bless the people he loves. True *agape* love is always seeking a way to express itself, to the benefit of the one loved.

Note also that God's resources for forgiveness and grace are inexhaustible.

in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus—Most world religions have men trying to appease the wrath of their angry gods. Christianity, the true religion, shows how eager God is to show his lovingkindness!

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee. So I will bless Thee as long as I live." (Psalm 63:3-4)

God's kindness for all eternity, however, is available only "in Christ Jesus."

V. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith—This is the Hallelujah Chorus of salvation! This puts the "good" in "good news." We are not saved by works of our own righteousness (which is woefully inadequate), but by the self-sacrifice of the righteous Jesus Christ.

It was God's grace that made possible this way of salvation. Grace is "unmerited favor," which means that God gave his goodwill and lovingkindness to people who did not deserve it. It means that even though we are

unworthy and undeserving, God likes us and wants us anyway! We are saved “by grace.”

The Greek uses the perfect tense for “you have been saved.” This tense shows the present result of past action. It means that the Christian should not be ashamed or afraid to say, “I am saved.” While salvation is sometimes viewed as in progress (1 Cor. 1:18) or a future event (Rom. 5:9-10), it is viewed here as a present reality. We are in the present state of having been saved.

We are saved by grace “through faith.” Faith is the response of the sinner to the Savior which appropriates God’s gift to him. Faith by no means “earns” salvation or makes the sinner “worthy” of grace. Faith is more than mere belief that God exists (James 2:19). Faith is “the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.” (Quoted from the official statement of faith of the Southern Baptist Convention, adopted and printed in 1963, p. 11.) Anything less than total commitment to Him as Lord is not saving faith!

and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—What is it that is not of our own doing? Is it faith? (Some have said that a person cannot believe until the Holy Spirit makes him believe.) Is it grace? Actually, it is neither. Both grace and faith are feminine gender in the Greek, while “this is not your own doing” is neuter gender. The neuter gender makes it refer to the entire concept of salvation, not to one of its particular parts. Salvation is what we cannot do for ourselves, and is therefore God’s gift.

V. 9 not because of works, lest any man should boast—No amount of good works could ever make up for our evil works. (Just as observing the speed limit most of the time does not make up for that one time you got caught! Neither would the fact that you are a good employee most of the time make up for embezzling from the company—even just once!)

When men try to gain heaven by “works,” one of two results always follows:

1. If a man is arrogant and blind, he may think he has actually earned heaven and he will boast. God’s way of salvation prevents boasting (1 Cor. 1:29, 31).
2. If a man is honest and conscientious, he will realize his own inadequacy. He will see that he is in constant peril of breaking just one law and coming under the curse of God (Gal. 3:10).

V. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them—Good works do have a place in our lives. They must follow

our salvation. Good works are not the source of our salvation, but the result of it. Works do not produce salvation, but salvation—if it is real—will produce works. To put it another way, good works are not the root of salvation, but the fruit of it. (See the essay following the study questions.)

Study Questions

1. How do trespasses and sins cause death?
2. When you sinned, did the devil make you do it? (See verse two.)
3. When you sinned, was it because God had made you with a sinful nature? (See verse three)
4. What is the real essence of sin?
5. What did God accomplish in the resurrection of Jesus that he also accomplishes in us?
6. In what sense do we already sit with Jesus in the heavenly places?
7. Try an experiment. Memorize Eph. 2:8 and quote it to your Bible School class. See if anyone recognizes it and can tell you where it is found. (I hope you are not as disappointed as I have been! Are we avoiding this verse?)
8. What is faith? Is it possible to be “full of faith” without being “faithful”?
9. How has God eliminated our ground of boasting?
10. Where do good works fit into God’s plan of salvation?

Work Without Faith is Dread

Or

“Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Grace, But Were Afraid to Ask”

“Brother, are you saved?” The question annoyed me. If my new friend had been going to the right church,

he would know not to ask questions like that. You can sing it (“Glory, I’m saved...”), you can pray it (“Thank Thee for saving us...”), but in orthodox circles you just don’t think or say it.

Ever since Luther turned his church door into a Protestant bulletin board, good Christian folks have been yearning for a feel of this forbidden confidence of salvation. Common sense and most of our preachers have warned us to stay clear. Salvation by grace through faith is just too good to be true!

Besides that, how can you keep the masses in line without a healthy fear of coming up short on Judgment Day?

Your solution of course, is to preach grace only as a prelude to a good stiff sermon on works. With all the jokes, illustrations, and theological double-talk removed, it comes out like this in layman’s language: “Salvation is God’s gift! You can’t earn it, but if you don’t earn it, you can’t keep it. Get busy!”

Now it’s true that trying to do all this work without an assurance of being saved produces dread, but that’s just the price you have to pay. Folks may feel frustrated and lost, but after all, that’s what keeps them coming back week after week!

In customary practice, the clergyman selects each week the virtue necessary for the aspiring saint to keep himself saved. The beautiful part of the program is that if the pew-people get close to attaining it, you can switch them next week to a different virtue.

Occasionally someone asks why it wouldn’t be better if we all simply responded to God with works of love. This is a dangerous question. For one, this could cause people to lose their fear. For another, if news of this ever got out, you might have to leave the brotherhood of the true church and start working with the Baptists!

In conclusion, and in order to prevent any more bulletins on the church doors, let us clarify this matter with a few definitions:

GRACE—Divine generosity in offering you a chance to earn the right to keep your salvation.

FAITH—Taking God up on his offer.

WORKS—The rental fee on the promise of salvation. Anytime you can’t quite work up the agreed price, you are evicted from the promises.

(I trust you caught the irony of this!)

Lesson Four (2:11-22)

One Body in Place of Two (2:11-16)

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

God has not only conquered death through Jesus Christ; he has also conquered division. “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). Christ not only reconciles man to God; he also reconciles man to his fellow man.

V. 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh—Paul has reminded us in the preceding ten verses how we were all dead and doomed, until God saved us. Now he points out that the Gentiles (all non-Jews) have even more reason to be thankful, for they were more alienated from God.

As the chosen people of God, the Jews felt contempt and hostility for the Gentiles. This is well illustrated by two quotations from the Talmud, the official body of Jewish civil and religious law. “Kill the best of the Gentiles! Crush the head of the best of snakes!” “The daughter of an Israelite may not assist a Gentile woman in childbirth, since she would be assisting to bring to birth a child for idolatry.”

called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision—It was highly derogatory to call someone “uncircumcision,” for the Greek word means literally “foreskin of the male penis.” Circumcision represented a division which was at once religious, social, racial, national, and physical. No dividing line of creed or color today could be more complete.

which is made in the flesh by hands—Paul no longer recognized circumcision as a mark of the covenant, identifying God’s people. In Christ there is a circumcision made **without** hands (Col. 2:11). The seal of the new covenant is not an external marking, but one that is internal and spiritual.