

Grace: The Gift of God – Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction

Whenever I think of the Letter to the Ephesians, I think of this Bible passage. Sure, there are other famous passages in Ephesians, like the armour of God in chapter 6, as well as the passages about husbands and wives, and the rules for family living, including slaves, in chapters 5 and 6. But if someone was to ask me about Ephesians, and the significance of this letter, I think I would turn to Ephesians 2:1-10. Why? Because this is the passage which applies the gospel on a cosmic scale. In this passage, we hear about death and life, sin and salvation, God's wrath and God's love, grace, and mercy. We hear about two kingdoms, and two ways to live. And the point of this passage is to remind us that it is God who saves us, and as saved people, we have a purpose in life.

A Grim Start

Paul starts in a very grim way, by telling us that we were once dead in our transgressions and sins. Now, the thing about dead people is that they cannot do very much. They can't eat, they can't talk, they can't even breathe. A dead body just lies there, not doing anything except decomposing. So, what did Paul mean when he said that we were dead in our transgressions and sins? Whenever I think of sin and death being linked together, I think of what Paul said in...

Romans 6:23a *For the wages of sin is death*

Back in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve that if they sinned, they would die. The wages they would earn for their sin was physical death. Of course, they did not die straight away, but they did end up dying a physical death years later. It is the same with us. We have all sinned and one day we will also die. It is a future, physical death. However, Adam and Eve did experience a kind of death as soon as they sinned. The death they experienced was a spiritual death. Their relationship with God had been broken and there was nothing they could do to repair it. So, they had to leave the garden where they had been in perfect relationship with God. So, when Paul says...

Ephesians 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*

I believe he was talking about a spiritual death. Our physical death will come in the future, but most people are spiritually dead now. That is, unless you are a Christian, because as Paul says, we *were* dead in our transgressions and sins, with the implication being that we are not spiritually dead anymore. So, how do we know if we are spiritually dead? Well, Paul tells us it is in the way we live.

How do we know?

Ephesians 2:1-3a *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 flesh and following its desires and thoughts.*

You can learn so much about people just by observing what they do, who they follow, and what their basic attitude to life is. You can see these three things in these verses. Paul began by talking about what people did. They were sinning, transgressing, disobeying God. He then spoke about who they were following. They were

following the ways of the world, and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. It sounds a bit cryptic, but the ruler of the kingdom of the air is Satan. Today, people don't like to talk about us following Satan. It sounds silly to our ears. But we all follow Satan, a bit like we follow a mentor, or a coach, who helps us to become more skilled at doing things they want us to do. Paul then spoke about people's attitudes. We see this in the spirit by which they lived their dead life. This attitude is like their ethos, their motto. It was an attitude of disobedience to God.

If we apply these three ideas to Adam and Eve, we can see how they became spiritually dead when they sinned. When Satan entered the scene in the form of a serpent, we see that Adam and Eve began to listen to Satan's lies. They stopped listening to God and began to follow what Satan had to say. They then began to think in worldly ways. They began to think about the ways of the flesh and gratifying its desires by rather than obeying God. They saw that the fruit would make good food for their flesh, and they thought they would gain wisdom, wisdom which they had not yet received from God. They then disobeyed God and sinned by eating the fruit they were told not to eat. They became spiritually dead to God and had to leave the garden, the place where they had been in a perfect relationship with God. From then on, their way of life was sinful. They had a spirit of disobedience at work in them.

We would be foolish not to think that we are not affected by the ways of this world, the desires of the flesh, and the lies of Satan. All of us have sinned and been disobedient, and the spirit of disobedience still affects us today. So, if a person is disobedient, living for this world, and following the ways of Satan rather than God, what does that mean for them? Let us look at verse three again, but this time we will look at the whole verse.

Deserving of Wrath

Ephesians 2:3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Sadly, there is a growing number of people who refuse to believe that they are sinful, that they are disobedient, that they are spiritually dead. They say that God knows them and loves them for who they are. They say that God is love and is not worried about the petty sins the Bible talks about. They are so opposed to God's ideas and God's way of life, that they cannot believe that they would be deserving of God's wrath.

I think part of this problem is that people think that love means acceptance. "If you love me, then you will accept everything about me, and will never be upset by anything I do." Can you see how manipulating that is? Imagine someone having an affair, and even telling their spouse about it. "It's okay", they say, "I just needed to feel good about myself, and that other person did that for me in that moment. I know that you will be okay about it, because you love me and accept me for who I am." You may love your spouse, but nobody loves being betrayed.

God had made humanity to be in a perfect relationship with him. Sure, he gave humanity the ability to sin, and sin would destroy that relationship we were supposed to have with him. When Adam and Eve rejected God, disobeyed him, and followed Satan, they betrayed that perfect relationship and destroyed all the good

they had with God. When we betray God and live as if he is dead to us, then we are living with the spirit of disobedience, craving the things of this world, acting in much the same way as Satan, disobeying our creator. When someone cheats on us, we feel betrayed and angry. We may even have the right to be wrathful if that cheating spouse got to take our children and grandchildren away from us too. Our family would be destroyed and we would be angry. Humanity has cheated on God and taken away his children. We deserve his wrath. It is a grim situation. We are already spiritually dead in our sins and are objects of God's wrath. There is no way of escape, not unless God provides one.

Love, Grace, and Mercy

***Ephesians 2:4-5** 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.*

When my dad prayed, he almost always used to thank God for his love, grace, and mercy. He was well known for this. I remember talking with some of dad's Bible Study group at his wake and they told me how they would miss dad's prayer for God's love, grace, and mercy. I don't know whether it was Ephesians 2 which started making him pray this way, but dad understood that he was no longer facing God's wrath, no longer spiritually dead, because God had taken him from death to life. These two verses are the turning point of the passage which help us understand how God takes us from the grim thought of death and judgement to the joy of everlasting life.

The first thing to notice is that a dead man cannot resuscitate himself. He cannot give himself CPR, he cannot administer a shot of adrenaline, or jump start his heart with a defibrillator. Like I said earlier, a dead person cannot do anything except decompose. In the same way, a spiritually dead person cannot do anything to save themselves from God's wrath. It is God who has to resuscitate us and make us spiritually alive again. Without God, we remain dead in our transgressions and sins.

Notice that it is out of God's love that he takes us from death to life. God does not just accept us the way we are, a rotting spiritual corpse. No, God does something about it. He shows us mercy by not giving us what we deserve. We deserve his wrath, but God does not pour out his wrath upon us, rather he pours it upon Jesus. At the beginning of Ephesians, we read...

***Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace*

Paul said something similar in his letter to the Romans...

***Romans 5:8-9** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

Jesus is our sacrifice of atonement. The wrath of God was poured out on Jesus as he died for our sins. For those who trust in Jesus' death to save them from their sins, God has shown us his mercy by pouring out his wrath on Jesus instead of us.

Resurrected and Ascended

In Ephesians 2:4-5, Paul tells us that God not only showed us mercy, he also showed us grace. In verses 6-7, we see that grace is linked with Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Ephesians 2:6-7 *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.*

A dead person is laid to rest in a grave because they are dead. But those who are spiritually united with Christ in his death are also spiritually united in his resurrection. God gives us something we do not deserve – life! And not just any life – eternal life with God forever more. God has raised us up with Christ and has seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. Paul doesn't say that this will happen sometime in the future. Paul is saying that this is our present reality, a spiritual reality we have right now. That is why we can talk to God in prayer in a way that nobody, apart from Adam and Eve in the garden, could do in the Old Testament. And that is significant. We have gone from death to life, from facing God's wrath to receiving God's love, grace, and mercy, from the Garden of Eden to the heavenly realms, from the kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God. So, while we still struggle with our earthly lives and with our sinfulness, we are spiritually seated with Christ in heaven. Paul is speaking of something that has already happened and that needs to impact the way we live now.

A New Creation

Ephesians 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is 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 handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Today, we have talked a lot about Adam and Eve, the first people that God created. At the end of our reading today, we are told that we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus. You might say that we have gone from creation to re-creation. God took a spiritually rotting corpse and gave it life. Now, if God has given us life, then we should not live like spiritually dead people. That would not make sense. It makes so much more sense for spiritually alive people to live for God. Living for God means that we put aside those earthly desires, we obey rather than disobey, and we follow Jesus instead of Satan. Verse 10 tells us that God has prepared good works for us to do. We will be finding out more about those good works and how we ought to live as we read more of this letter. But what I really want you to see is that Paul has set up a Two Ways To Live scenario. We either live in our sins and transgressions, which means that we are spiritually dead and we face God's wrath, or we live the resurrected life, putting aside our sinfulness and doing the good works which God has prepared for us to do. The challenge is, which life are you living?