

Ephesians 2:1-10

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit, we ask. Give us ears to hear, minds to know, and hearts to receive all that you have for us in the Lord Jesus.

! And we pray these things in his name. Amen. May I have a seat. May I have a seat. Welcome. If you're new, I'm so glad that you've joined us today.

Today, we're going to get straight to the heart of what Christians believe about humanity and about God. And we're doing that by jumping into the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And this chapter gives us two pictures of salvation. And each picture tells us what we need to be saved from, as well as how we are saved from it.

And in doing so, Ephesians chapter 2 is both brutally honest and it's refreshingly hopeful at the same time.

[1:04] I think it was Tim Keller who once said, it was in a book on marriage, he said, the good news of Jesus Christ tells us that we are, first of all, more flawed and sinful than we ever dared to believe.

And yet, at the same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared to hope. And it's both things at the same time. And that's essentially what Ephesians chapter 2 is going to teach us today.

First, we are more flawed than we dared to believe. And yet, we are more loved than we ever dare hope. So we're going to get into it. More flawed.

Look at Ephesians chapter 2, starting in verse 1 with me. The first three verses are really about sin. And when we talk about sin, we have to realize that sin is a sneaky thing.

It's a sneaky thing to talk about. It is part of the work of sin in our lives that we fail to see the work of sin in our lives. And so this is really what we're talking about here in these three verses.

[2:11] We need the Holy Spirit to open up our eyes, the eyes of the heart, and give us the capacity to see. And it's also true that one of the things that we experience in the Christian life is as the Holy Spirit transforms us, as we experience more and more the grace of the Lord Jesus, and we become more and more like Jesus, the more and more we become sensitive to the ways in which we are not like Jesus.

So there's this paradoxical thing in the Christian life where it's like the more holy you become, the more you realize you're unholy. And so as we come into this few verses about sin, we depend on the Holy Spirit.

And the thing that Paul wants us to know is before you knew the Lord Jesus Christ, or apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, your life was really bleak. You were more flawed than you ever realize.

There was a recent study that came out that actually this year, earlier this year, that conducted a survey of what Canadian evangelical Christians believe.

So what people like you and me believe about God and the Bible and salvation. And what I found really interesting is what the survey said people believe about sin. There were two statements that were given to people in this poll that people could say I agree or disagree.

[3:28] And the first statement was this, everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God. Do you agree or disagree? Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

73% of Canadian evangelicals said they agree. It's interesting if you turn to verse 3 with me here. Paul says, he says at the very end of verse 3, God's wrath is not his bad temper.

It's not a parent getting frustrated with his kids. It's in no way capricious, no way unpredictable, no way spiteful. God's wrath, rather, is his personal, predictable, righteous, and relentless hostility towards all the evil that seeks to threaten and ruin his creation.

It's his unwillingness to compromise with evil in any way, shape, or form. And it's his resolve to condemn evil in every form. In other words, God's wrath is an aspect of his goodness when it comes into contact with evil, what is not good.

And Paul's saying that we are by nature children of wrath. Now, this means that in some sense, we were born with a nature that was bent toward evil.

[4:57] So we're not actually born innocent, Paul says. We are born with a nature that's bent towards evil, and we are guilty before God. And this is one of the reasons why Jesus had to come, is to deliver us from that.

Interestingly, the second statement in the survey was this. Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. Agree or disagree?

Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. Think about it. And 60% of people that took the poll, Canadian evangelicals answered they agree.

And it's interesting. Look at verse 1 with me in chapter 2. Paul paints a bit of a different picture. He says, And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you once walked.

Paul's saying our problem is not that we sin every once in a while, despite our best intentions and our inherently good nature. Paul's picture here is that you are dead.

[6:01] You're quite literally walking dead people. The image is of a bunch of zombies who have physical life and vitality, but spiritually they're not that interested in God, and they're unresponsive to him.

And so the picture is of not people who are inherently good and every once in a while slip up. The picture is we are caught in a cycle of sinning from which we cannot free ourselves any more than a corpse can raise itself out of the grave.

It's quite a serious picture. And Paul says this is a reason why Jesus had to come to save you. So in summary, Paul is saying your situation was bad from birth, and your situation is like a zombie, a living death.

And to add to this, to make matters a little worse, between these two statements, Paul says we are hopelessly trapped in an unholy trinity of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

So if you were baptized, you might remember, unless you were a kid, that part of the baptism prayers that we have to praise, we have to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil. And here Paul highlights those and says, before we met Christ, we had no power to renounce them.

[7:18] So if you look at verse 2, Paul says, part of our death is that we were willingly and joyfully following the course of this world. And here world doesn't mean just like the physical earth or the globe.

World means society organized without reference to God. There was a study done in 2009 where some scientists wanted to see if people could walk in a straight line without the sun or the moon as a visual reference point.

And they discovered that human beings actually can't. It's a fascinating study. Without a fixed, objective, real reference point like the sun or the moon or the stars, outside of us, human beings, it's impossible for them to walk in a straight line.

And they found that people actually just walked in circles. And they weren't even that big of circles. They were less than 20 meters in diameter on average. And it proves the point that I think Paul is trying to make is without God as our real and objective reference point, without God as our compass and our savior, we just walk in circles.

And we're caught in this cycle of following the world, of following particular political movements and particular social movements, and particular ideological movements.

[8:43] And we get caught up in it as if what the world is offering is what we truly want. And he goes on. He says in verse two, it's not just the world.

It's not just economics. It's not just politics. It's not just social movements. There's actually an evil spiritual force that's involved in all this. Like there's more than meets the eye.

So if you look at verse two, he says, you were not only following the world, but you were following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, which is just a kind of old fashioned way of saying Satan's real, the devil's real, and he's active.

In other words, there are real evil spiritual forces in the world that are trying to influence the world so that you are deceived and tempted away from God so that you become a part of the evil that Satan is trying to create in the world.

And as if that wasn't bleak enough, how are you guys doing? You all right? Take a deep breath because we're going to go one step further. Remember what I said?

[9:55] It's going to be soberingly honest. Paul's not hold back here. And then he goes on to talk about the flesh in verse three. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

In other words, Paul is saying the problem isn't just the world and the cultural movements that we get swept up in. Paul isn't saying that the problem isn't just Satan and the way he tries to deceive us and lie to us and tempt us.

The problem is also right in here. And flesh for Paul doesn't mean like physical flesh. It actually describes the orientation of the human heart when it's out of sync with God.

So the flesh means our moral compass is wrong. It means our desires are disordered. And it means the way we use our body and mind is misdirected.

And so Paul's description of the human condition, apart from grace, is a pretty devastating depiction, isn't it? It's a picture of what we need to be saved from. And it is honest.

[11:01] It is raw. It is bleak. And it applies to all of us. As we said at the beginning, we are more flawed and fallen in ourselves than we ever dared believe.

And yet the wonderful reality of Ephesians chapter two is that we are more loved than we ever dared imagine at the same time. Do you see those two little words at the very beginning of verse four, but God?

That stands in the way of everything we've just seen in verses one through three. Those two little words, but God, it's like they bring to a screeching halt a whole avalanche of human sin and sorrow.

God stands in the way of our own self-destruction. And God comes to bring us new life. Didn't you love that reading about Jonah and Nineveh? Isn't that a wonderful little piece of the Bible?

Where God tells Jonah, I want you to go to the Ninevites and I want you to preach the gospel to them and invite them to repent. And Jonah says, no, I don't want to do it.

[12:06] God makes him go and he does it. And the whole city's repenting and turning to God. And Jonah is angry. And do you notice how he describes God in anger? He says, God, I knew you would be a God who's gracious and merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And he's just angry that that's the sort of God he is. But Paul's not quite angry here. He's pretty delighted by this fact. Paul is astonished by this fact.

And he layers, the passage sparkles with superlatives of grace. Did you notice how it's not enough for Paul just to say God is merciful to us. Paul has to say God being rich in mercy.

It's not enough for Paul just to say, you know, God really loves you. He has to say with the great love with which God loved us. It's not enough for Paul just to say, yeah, God showed us grace.

I'm so thankful. He has to say, no, God lavished on you the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. And there's a very specific way in which Paul understands all these perfections and character traits of God as working together to bless us.

[13:21] Paul sees God's love as the reason why he is merciful and gracious to those who do not deserve it. And then Paul sees God's mercy and grace as expressed in kindness to those who do not deserve kindness.

And what does God's kindness do? In this passage, God's kindness establishes an impenetrable bond of union. Did you see that?

Verses five and six. Paul describes the grandeur of what God has done through three verbs. Three verbs that describe what God did to Jesus. He made him alive.

He raised him up. He seated him at the right hand. But what Paul does is he puts the prefix with at the beginning of each of those verbs. So he says, God made us alive together with Christ.

Literally, you could translate it, with him made alive. It's co-resurrection. And then in verse six, God raised us up together with Christ.

[14:27] Literally, you could say with him raised. It's co-ascension. And then in verse six, God seated us together with Christ. Literally, it's with him seated.

It's co-enthronement. And so what's going on here? Paul is describing a key aspect of God's love to us. I think it was Thomas Aquinas who said, there are two aspects to God's love to us.

Number one, he acts for the good of the beloved. And number two, he seeks to unite the beloved to himself. And do you see how those two things actually go together?

Because if you're really acting for the good of the beloved and you're God, you know that you're the greatest good the beloved could ever have. And so in seeking the good of the beloved, you seek to unite them to yourself. And here in Ephesians two, we see both aspects of love at work.

God acts for our good. He raises us from spiritual death into life. And yet God doesn't just leave us to ourselves. He seeks to unite us to himself. And one of the beautiful things here is that the picture of salvation is not simply Jesus dying for our sins and forgiving us and then letting us go our merry way forgiven.

[15 : 38] But that's a really good thing. It's the picture of salvation is of God uniting us to his son, Jesus Christ for all eternity. We are bound with Christ.

We are engrafted into Christ by God. Our lives are hidden in Christ and united with Christ. If I was to describe it to my kids, I would say, you have been gorilla glued to Christ by God.

Nothing's breaking that bond. And this means that in some very real way, what happened to Jesus on Easter Sunday is happening in your life.

The fact that on Easter Sunday, he rose from the grave means a resurrection life is at work in you, bringing you from death into new life. The fact that he was raised up and seated at the right hand of God means that in some sense, you have victory over all the evil and powers that are set against you in this world.

In some sense, because Christ is seated at the right hand of God and has perfect access to God the Father, you too, in some sense, are seated at the right hand of God and have perfect access to God the Father.

[16 : 53] There is a way in which all the grace that Christ experiences in his humanity before God is something that we can experience too because we are bound with him.

Does that make sense? So we have a new life and we have a new victory and we have a new status and we have a new identity and we have a new spiritual vitality because we're gorilla glued to Christ.

Now, for Paul, I think this has three major implications for our life. And I just want to spend a couple minutes on each of these.

I think this has three major implications. Verse 7, through union with Christ, the purpose of your life changes drastically.

Look at verse 7. This is where Paul's outlining the purpose of all that God is doing in uniting us to Christ. Verse 7, he says, so that in the coming ages, he, God, might show, the word show there means display or make evident to the world.

[18 : 06] It's that sort of idea. He might display or make evident to the world the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us who believe.

In other words, when our lives are united with Christ, our lives are engrafted into the purposes of God and our lives no longer become about displaying our own glory and our own graces and our own power, but displaying the glory and the graces and the power of God that have been given to us.

So in other words, our lives become little evidences in the world to other people of God's kindness. Our lives become little living canvases of God's grace to those who haven't seen it before.

God's trying to show the world something about who his character is as an abundantly full of love and mercy through what he's doing in our lives. I love the way that St. Patrick put it in his prayer, St. Patrick's Breastplate.

You know, he prays all these things that describe our union with Christ. He says, Christ in me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ to my right, my left, when I sit down, when I, you know, all these things.

[19 : 25] Christ everywhere. But at the very end of the prayer, he prays four really interesting things. He says, Christ in the heart of every person who thinks of me. Christ in the mouth of every person who speaks of me.

Christ in every eye that sees me. And Christ in every ear that hears me. There's this sense that we are so united with Christ.

His work is so powerful in our lives that when people see us, they can catch a glimpse of Christ. And they can say, glory be to Christ for all that he's doing in your life.

And so, and so Paul says, when you are united with Christ, the purpose of your life changes drastically. And number two, Paul says, through union with Christ, when you're united to him, the

foundation of your life changes radically.

What you're building your life on. Look at verses eight and nine. He says, for by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

[20 : 31] It is the gift of God. Not a result of works so that no one may boast. Not a result of works so that no one may boast.

In other words, he says, the foundation of your life has changed radically because it's now based on grace. It's no longer about what you can build and what you can achieve and what you can earn and what you can secure on your own power.

But it's about what you have received that you in no way deserved. And it's no longer about what you can boast in.

But it's about what you can give thanks for. And this foundation in your life is something that is massively secure. Because if it's something you achieved or accomplished or secured, you know that your weakness will always threaten the foundation of your life.

But because it is something that you have received purely by grace, you know that it is unshakable. You have, through union with Christ, a foundation for your life that changes everything.

[21 : 33] And the third and final thing comes to us in verse 10 where Paul says, through union with Christ, the work of your life changes comprehensively. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Let's read that one more time. For we are his workmanship. It's the language of God creating something new. Created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Notice we're not saved by works, but we're saved for good works. Which God prepared beforehand. This is something that God wanted for us. This is a blessing from him that he's thought about for a long time.

That we should walk in them. And did you notice that walking image? At the very beginning of the passage, it was we were zombies, we were walking dead people. And now at the end of the passage, it's we're walking living people.

We're walking new creations because of what God has done in us. And so there's this sense that the work of our lives takes on a different tone and a different texture.

[22 : 51] It may be hard, the work that God gives us to do, but it doesn't have to be heavy because through union with Christ, God is supplying us with everything we need to live a new life and to walk in the ways that he is calling us to.

And I think this is really significant because as we go on later in Ephesians, we're going to realize that in our homes, in our marriages, in our co-working relationships, in our day-to-day struggle with anger, in our moment-to-moment choice of what words we use to express ourselves, in the way that we relate to each other in the body of Christ when we constantly need to forgive each other and hurt each other, and all these day-to-day things that Paul talks about in the second half of the letter, he says all these things are totally transformed by the fact that you are united with Christ.

And his power and his grace is transforming you in such a way that you can live a different sort of life than you lived before. And so this is supposed to be a really hopeful thing for us where as we go out into the world this week, we can remember Ephesians 2 and we can be really honest and say, yeah, I'm more flawed and fallen in myself than I ever dared to believe.

And yet I know that I'm more loved and accepted in Jesus than I ever dared to hold. And I know that I'm not just going into the world Jesus sending me saying good luck out there.

I'm going into the world gorilla glued to Jesus. In every moment, he wants to supply me with wisdom. He's there with me. In every moment, he wants to give me the grace.

[24 : 32] I'm bound to him. In every moment, he wants to give me the power because I am raised with him. In every moment, he wants to remind me that I have access to God because I'm seated with him.

In every moment, my union with Christ infusing the day. Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ above me, Christ beneath me, and Christ in me.

So brothers and sisters, this is the power of Ephesians 2. We've been raised from death to life.

We've been united with Christ. And now we get to follow him as his little new creations, visibly displaying the power of his grace in the world.

Amen. Amen.