

SESSION 5

THE PATH TO FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
WE CAN BE FORGIVEN
BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS
HAS DONE FOR US.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

² in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient.

³ We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.

.....
⁴ 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!

⁶ He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,

⁷ so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

.....
⁸ **For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift —** ⁹ **not from works, so that no one can boast.**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Dread (v. 1)—The Greek term (*nekros*) literally refers to a corpse. Figuratively, it refers to someone who is spiritually dead or unresponsive, alienated from God, the Giver of life.

Ruler...of air (v. 2)—Refers to Satan, "the spirit now working in the disobedient." Satan

is "the god of this age" who "has blinded the minds of the unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Workmanship (v.10)— Refers to what has been made, the product of one's craft.. Believers are the product of God's grace and glory, , of Christ's work on the cross.

HOW DID JESUS'S DEATH ON THE CROSS MAKE FORGIVENESS POSSIBLE?

People take personal assessments for a variety of reasons, including as part of a job search or educational pursuit. There are also tests that provide insights into how a person's talents and interests can be used for good. Regardless of the particular type of assessment, one thing remains the same: the need for honesty when completing it. People are less likely to receive information that will help them move forward if they are not honest about where they are when they begin the process.

As important as these types of assessments are, taking an assessment of where we are spiritually is even more important. Apart from Christ, our situation is not good, to say the least. As we see in this lesson, we are not alive spiritually until we accept the forgiveness that God offers us in Christ. To move forward, we have to appreciate where we began. Through Christ, God offers us forgiveness and blessings beyond our ability to comprehend or imagine. Forgiveness is a gift that God gives us, because of the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf.

We Are Dead in Our Sins Apart from Christ // Ephesians 2:1-3

The apostle Paul begins this chapter with an honest assessment on the state of the Ephesians, and all people, apart from Christ. He does not mince words. Without Christ, the people he addressed were dead in their sins. Being dead is being powerless to do anything, including being able to change to do what is right. Christianity is not a self-help religion, because in humanity's state apart from Christ, human beings are not in a position to do anything to improve their spiritual condition. Absent God's intervention, the status is helplessness and hopelessness. Spiritual death is being in a state apart from God and His will for one's life.

These trespasses and sins involve what has been called omission and commission. Both failing to do what is right (omission) and actively choosing

to do what is wrong when a person knows right (commission) are sins. Unfortunately, this is the way of the world. The world's system operates in opposition to God's desires and causes people to believe that fulfilling one's personal desires is all that matters. The idea that people can live their best lives apart from God's will is erroneous, because as the apostle has stated, without God people are not actually alive spiritually.



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Paul explains what yielding to the world's system looks like. It involves following the "ruler of the power of the air" (v. 2) and yielding to fleshly desires. Later, Paul identifies this ruler as being the devil (Eph. 6:11). Paul uses the air as a description of the unseen spiritual realm between heaven and earth where spiritual warfare takes place. Even though God is sovereign and ultimately in control, He has allowed the enemy a measure of power in what has been created. The power of the air mention prefaces discussion of spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Recall at Jesus's temptation, the devil offered Him rule over the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him (Luke 4:5-7). While many people may view doing whatever their flesh entices them to do as being free, it is really being in bondage to the power and work of the devil. People who do not yield to the work of God are subject to the workings of the enemy.

To prevent the believers in Ephesus from thinking they are better than the people around them living by the world's system, the apostle reminds them that they had lived under the power of the world's system of operating as well. As such, they were in danger of experiencing God's wrath, just like all other sinners. Their past reality was the same as the current reality of unbelieving sinners. God's wrath is manifest against wickedness (Rom. 1:18). Paul reminds the Ephesians of the bad news before moving on to the good news. The world, the enemy, and the flesh all influence those apart from God in their thoughts and behavior.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LIFE IN YOUR B.C. (BEFORE CHRIST) DAYS?

We Are Forgiven Through Christ

// Ephesians 2:4-7

Paul's tone and focus shift, beginning with two small words: "But God" (v. 4). Thankfully the story does not end with the bad news of the preceding verses. Rather, Paul declares there is reason for hope in the midst of humanity's hopeless existence apart from God. There is hope because God is rich in mercy. He does not hoard these riches, however. Instead, God lavishes this mercy on unworthy people. God's mercy is abundant and it does not run out. As the psalmist said, "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His faithful love endures forever" (Ps. 136:1). Though justly angered by sin, God nonetheless reaches out to sinners in mercy and provides a way to save them through Christ.

All of this is because of the great love that God has for His children. God's love initiated the plan of salvation. Paul reminds the Ephesians of what this great love has done for them. Because of God's great love, He has made them alive. God is love, and mercy



DIGGING DEEPER AMAZING GRACE

Paul tells the Ephesians they have been saved by grace (Eph. 2:5,8). The word grace is *charis* in Greek and connotes the unmerited and forgiving love that God shows humanity. While human beings deserve God's wrath and punishment for our sins, God has offered us something that we do not deserve grace. Paul makes the contrast between what we do and do not deserve clear in his letter to believers in Rome. There he says, "for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Wages are earned through a person's labor, and our sin earns us death, but God has offered us the gift of salvation. No wonder John Newton was inspired to compose "Amazing Grace," one of the Church's most beloved hymns testifying about this gift.

How can you demonstrate your gratitude and appreciation for God's amazing grace?

flows because of this love, not from anything human beings have done. This life-giving work is something that only God can do. In reversal of their prior condition of being dead in trespasses, God has given the Ephesian believers life. God's actions prove the depths of His love. Paul also declares this in Romans: "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Paul emphatically declares that salvation is because of grace. Grace is the favor God shows humanity without regard to merit. An acronym refers to grace as providing people with: "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." Paul explains that God showed the Ephesians grace in saving them so He could shower them with even more grace through Christ. Believers are raised in life with Christ and according to Paul, God counts this as being done for all believers at Christ's resurrection. By being united to Christ, believers experience the power of His resurrection in their earthly lives, while looking forward to Christ's return. Just as God raised Christ from the dead, thereby overruling His death, so too does God raise the Ephesian believers to life with Christ undoing their prior condition. The life that Paul talks about is not about believers having their best lives on their own, but is about being spiritually joined to Christ's resurrection life.

Believers receive a number of benefits by being united with Christ. They are alive together with Christ, raised together with Christ, and seated together in heavenly places with Christ. Although the Ephesian believers are currently separated from Christ physically, Paul assures them that this condition does not negate their connection to Christ. If this were not enough, even more benefits await the believers in Ephesus. Paul explains that the best is yet to come, as God will continue to show His grace in the ages ahead.

HOW CAN YOU REMAIN CONSISTENTLY AWARE OF YOUR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION TO CHRIST?

We are Forgiven by Grace in Christ // Ephesians 2:8-10

Paul expounds on the point he made in verse 5, that believers in Christ are saved by the grace

of God. In salvation, God rescues human beings from the penalty and power of sin. When saved, believers have assurance that they have right standing before God because of Christ. Paul adds that salvation comes through faith. The only part people play in this scenario is accepting what God has done for them by faith. Even the ability to have faith and believe comes from God. This is not something that people are able to do on their own. Salvation is only possible because God makes it possible.



Throughout the passage, Paul makes it clear that salvation is something that God graciously chooses to offer humanity. People cannot earn salvation through works. Writing to the believers in Rome, Paul says "no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law" (Rom. 3:20). Since humans cannot bring salvation to pass, God has to do it. God did not offer salvation under duress or out of obligation, but because He wanted to do so. Since no one is able to earn salvation, no one is able to boast about themselves for receiving it. God alone deserves the glory for His saving power and His willingness to save.

Elsewhere, Paul says, "we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11). If people want to boast at all about salvation, it can only be to boast about what God has done. God has given humanity an immeasurable gift. Once

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received, salvation and forgiveness are given once and for all.

While people are not saved because of good works, people are saved in order to perform good works. This is similar to the point that James makes when he says, "I will show you faith by my works" (James 2:18). Paul wants the Ephesian believers to know that God had plans for them when He saved them. They, along with all believers, are God's workmanship. The word workmanship connotes the idea of a painting or a sculpture, something that an artist intentionally takes time to create. God sees believers as His works of art. God's plan of salvation demonstrates His creativity and artistry that He showed by creating the universe at the beginning. By being in Christ, believers are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and are also proof of divine grace. While the passage begins with the hopeless image of people walking in the ways of the world apart from Christ, it concludes with the image of believers walking in the works that God has called them and created them to do. Believers simultaneously sit with Christ in glory and serve as the hands and feet of Christ on earth. Paul is clear that the grace of God enables all of this.

WHAT WORKS HAS GOD PREPARED FOR YOU TO DO?

DID YOU KNOW?

A foundational claim of Christianity is that salvation is by the grace of God. In fact, as the medieval church had gotten away from this understanding, Protestant Reformers insisted that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. Some people may question this and think that they are good enough people to earn their way into heaven. There are at least two problems with this thinking. First, there is the question of whose standard they are using to judge themselves. While they may feel good about themselves compared to others, the standard is God's holiness. Second, there is the question of why they would want to try to "earn their way in" when God has already given us a way in. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God lavishes grace on those who accept Him.

Biblical Truth: "See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are!" (1 John 3:1a).

Why do some people find it difficult to rely on God's free gift of grace to receive salvation?

LIVE IT

Have you accepted God's gracious gift of salvation in Jesus Christ?

God has provided a path to forgiveness. He offers the gift of forgiveness because of grace. Consider whether or not you have repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ. If not, read the inside cover of this book and ask God for the forgiveness that only He can offer. If you already have a relationship with Christ, pray for others in the group, that they might come to know Him also.

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- **Thank God (again) for the gift of salvation.** This amazing gift deserves continual praise and gratitude. Pray that you will never take God's gift for granted.
- **Write down your salvation testimony.** Think about the person you were before you accepted Christ and how God has changed you. Write the story down and be prepared to share it.
- **Support those engaging in evangelism.** Pray for the people evangelizing the lost and consider supporting their ministry by contributing funds and other resources. Look for opportunities to share God's amazing grace with others.

DAILY READINGS

1. THE HEAD SHEEP IN CHARGE // EPHESIANS 2:1-3

Ever seen sheep lead themselves? They wander, get lost, and/or get eaten. Before encountering Christ, that was us. We did what we wanted. We were in control. We knew what was best, right? Wrong. We quickly learned that leading ourselves wasn't all it was cracked up to be. It was here that Jesus found us and taught us a better way. The same love that drew us to give up our old lives, is the same love that draws us to willingly take inventory today. Choosing Jesus as our Lord, makes Him our Shepherd and gives us access to safety, purpose, fulfillment, and life—the kind that doesn't come with the byproduct of death. We just simply listen and obey.

Sheep need a shepherd. Jesus is that Shepherd for us.

2. WITH ALL MY HEART // ROMANS 2:4; EPHESIANS 2:4-7

Think about the last time you forgave someone you loved dearly. They did "it," were guilty as charged, and still forgave because you simply couldn't imagine doing anything else. In the same way that you found a reason to quickly forgive because of how much you valued the relationship, what if God created a way to forgive us because of how much He values relationship with and craves intimacy with us? This is the power of His love, that even though we were guilty, Jesus sacrificed Himself in our place because He simply couldn't imagine doing anything else. This grace shows us the heart of God, and this same love also draws us to repentance.

We now willingly lay our lives, and everything in them, for Him.

3. TO DIE FOR // EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Ever heard someone say that something was "to die for"? Maybe you've heard someone use this phrase to describe a food or a product. Hopefully, no one would literally give their lives for a steak or slice of chess pie. But, what if I told you someone took this idiom literally and meant every word? Someone did.

God. He placed so much value on our lives that He literally gave His own Son to die as payment for our sin. We couldn't begin to imagine doing the same, but He did. We honor Him by fully acknowledging the life exchange and living a life worthy of it.

In our gratitude, daily, we ensure that His perfect sacrifice is truly honored in all that we do.

4. EXEMPT STATUS // MATTHEW 18:21-22

Humor me. What if you actually give that person what they deserve? You never let him or her live "it" down. You build a monument of memory every chance you get and never forgive. Who wins in that scenario? This picture of unforgiveness is very real for many but wholly unrealistic for the Believer. Why? One reason is that willful unforgiveness means unforgiveness from God. Without access to Jesus' sacrifice, our prayers are hindered. The question, then, becomes is anyone worth our prayers, worth eternal damnation and separation from God? I hope not. Working through us, Jesus makes forgiveness possible in every situation, and He did that out of love for both us and them.

When we forgive, especially in the hardest moments, we testify to of Jesus's undeserved sacrifice.

5. MAPPING THE WAY // JEREMIAH 29:11; JOHN 14:6

I have often heard converts from other religions speak of attempting to work for their own salvation, work to achieve nirvana or paradise, prior to coming to Christ. They often speak of feeling unsatisfied the more they searched. Some even described feeling an ever-expanding pit. When we think about this alternative and why Jesus would pursue us to show us another way and why He would pursue us even in our sin, we see a revelation of His heart. His plan was always for us to have hope and a future. The emptiness that they described was never intended for us, but it is the alternative. Thank God! Jesus is the way.

When we testify of the life we now have, we allow Him to illuminate others' path as well.