

Ephesians 2

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1-18-09

Introduction.

- A. I once saw a cartoon that depicted two people, one an elderly lady, and the other, a middle-aged man. He's sitting behind a desk with a sign that reads, "Loan Officer". It's obvious that the lady is trying to get a loan. According to the caption, the man is saying, "I know all that, Mom, but what have you done for me lately?"
- B. As we all well know, ingratitude is a depressingly common trait. Everybody wants to know what we've done for them lately. Sadly, this attitude of ingratitude can creep into our minds as well. It's obnoxious enough when we are ungrateful in our dealings with our mothers, for instance, but it can be spiritually deadly to be ungrateful toward God. That's why we need to remind ourselves of what God has done for us.
- C. Of course, the whole Bible describes the love and the care of God, but there is probably not a better text for this than the second chapter of Ephesians. As we read this chapter, though, we need to remember that Paul isn't introducing this subject out of the blue. Instead, he's comparing what God has done for us to what God has done for Christ, which Paul describes in Ephesians 1:19-22. As we saw last week, this is a text in which Christ begins with nothing and ends up with everything. He starts out dead and ends up with all things under His feet. Paul's point is that God has done and will do for us just as much as He did for Christ. Unless we understand this and how much we owe God, we won't ever be the thankful people that God wants us to be. With this in mind, let's study this evening the mighty works of God outlined in Ephesians 2.

I. Grace Through Christ.

- A. Let's begin this evening by reading the first main chunk, Ephesians 2:1-10. Within this chunk, we obviously need to start with vss. 1-3. This context does not paint a pretty picture of mankind, brethren. It tells us that without Christ, we were dead. Without Christ, we were followers of Satan. Without Christ, we were by nature children of wrath. This last idea is one that Calvinists love to seize on. They say that this verse establishes that human beings are essentially corrupt, that we are of ourselves so evil that we cannot seek and find God. Of course, the verse actually says no such thing. Let me illustrate why. As my wife will tell you, to her great irritation, it is a very natural thing for me to do to come home from work, plop down in front of the computer, and play computer games for far too long. Does that mean that I was born with the irresistible urge to play Medieval: Total War? No! It just means that by inclination and habit, I have accustomed myself to playing computer games. In the same way, none of us have something inborn that makes God hate us. Instead, what this text is telling us is that because of our inclinations, because of our bad habits, we have developed a lifestyle that invites the wrath of God. It has become natural for us to be evil.
- B. Some Christians really don't want to accept this as a portrait of themselves. They prefer to think of themselves as sinners with an asterisk, that by and large, they were fine before they obeyed the gospel, and indeed are basically fine after having obeyed it. They think that all they need Christ for is to tidy up the edges of their spiritual lives a little bit, to supply that extra 1% of godliness. Friends, if that's how we see our spiritual lives, we are deceiving ourselves. The truth is that on our own we are dead meat. The truth is that on our own, we are so easily fooled by the devil that he can get us to do whatever he wants to. The truth is that on our own, we are naturally children of wrath, no less so than the drug dealer on the corner or the murderer behind bars. In God's eyes, the difference between our works and theirs is negligible. We're not people who kinda need Jesus to get us over the hump. We are people who desperately need Jesus to rescue us from death.
- C. Thankfully, the help that we needed is the help that God provided. Paul describes it in vss. 4-7. This all started not with us, but with God and His great mercy, and His great love. Even though we were all just dead men walking who did not deserve help, He chose to favor us with His grace. Just like He raised Christ from physical death, so He raised us from spiritual death. Just like He seated Jesus at His right hand, so He has exalted us by making us heirs of eternal life. Brethren, that's infinitely more than any other favor anyone else has done for us. In human terms, we might think that God would expect something gigantic from us in return, like when a judge waives a convict's prison sentence on the condition that he enlist in the Army. According to Paul, that's not even close to God's plan for us. After all, what could we possibly do that God would need? Instead, as Paul says here, God saved us so that the simple fact of our salvation will glorify Him through eternity. We have been rescued from hell so that we can serve as monuments to His great grace and love. We pay nothing, but get eternal life, and as long as we live, we need to glorify God for that.
- D. Paul then goes on in vss. 8-10 to explain why our salvation would accomplish God's purpose. Think of this chunk as an aside before Paul picks back up with his main thought in vs. 11. It's because we have been saved by His grace, through our faith. After all, everybody was not automatically saved by Jesus' death on the cross. Instead, we have to believe in God's power to save us, and that belief is what will redeem us from the power of the devil. We don't save ourselves. We don't wake up one morning and say, "I'm going to start living right

today," and please God by our perfect law-keeping. That wouldn't redeem us in God's eyes, any more than a thief who goes straight is off the hook for his previous crimes. Even baptism isn't part of that kind of salvation. God isn't so wowed by our ability to get wet that it wipes out everything else we've done. Instead, baptism is only effective through our faith. We believe in God's promises, act in accordance with those promises, and God delivers the salvation He promised. That's how baptism operates: not by works, but by faith.

- E. However, even though we cannot save ourselves, Paul makes clear in vs. 10 that we don't just get to do whatever we want. We were saved not so that we could continue to live as children of wrath, but so that we could live lives of obedience and good works. Once again, contrary to what a lot of Christians think, those good works aren't limited to coming to services three times a week, either. God wants us to be lights in the world. He wants us to be people who are so obviously dedicated to righteousness and love that anybody who looks at us can see that we are disciples of Jesus. That's the challenge of our Christianity: in our assemblies, in our service groups, and in our entire lives, doing good works for God because of what He's done for us.

II. Unity Through Christ.

- A. That's the end of Paul's digression about grace. Thereafter, he returns to his topic in vs. 7. He describes the ways that the kindness of Christ is revealed in our lives, specifically in the unity that we now have through Him. We see this in Ephesians 2:11-22. This discussion begins with vss. 11-12, which is fairly similar to what we looked at earlier in vss. 1-3. Here, though, Paul addresses Gentile Christians. He points out how insignificant the difference between them and Jewish Christians is now, but then describes how significant it used to be. Before Christ, the Gentiles were alone. They had no relationship with God's people, and they had no relationship with God. Folks, that's where we are without Christ in our lives too. We can show up for services all we want, but until we put on Christ, we are not part of the church. Likewise, we can sing and pray all we want, but until we obey the gospel, God isn't going to listen. That division isn't the church's fault or God's fault. It's the consequence of our own decisions, and until we decide differently, we too are hopeless.
- B. Of course, Paul then presents the hope that we can have in Jesus in vss. 13-18. His blood is what brings us near. When Paul describes Jesus as our peace, he's referring to Jewish prophecies contained in Micah 5 and Zechariah 9, prophecies that portray the peace of the Messiah, but in the rest of this chunk, he defines what this peace means for the Gentiles. First of all, they have peace with the Jews. This is a big deal, folks. Before Jesus came, the Jews and the Gentiles hated each other. The Jews obeyed all the rituals of the Law and thought the Gentiles were wicked for not doing so. On the other hand, the Gentiles regarded the Jews with contempt because of their strange practices. Paul tells us that Jesus abolished that enmity by abolishing its cause: the Law. Without the Law, Jews and Gentiles can be united together in Jesus.
- C. This idea is still just as important today. We know that in our world, people divide over all sorts of things: race, age, economic status, and so on. The message of the gospel is that in Jesus, those things don't matter. We can assemble together with people who are different from us in every way but their faith, and still be closer to them than to our own blood kin. That's what Jesus wants. Let's be sure to live up to it.
- D. Likewise, Jesus ended our conflict with God. He killed it with His own death. Most people in the world might think that their sins aren't any big deal, but God obviously thinks differently. I'm certain that if there was any lesser sacrifice God could have made to satisfy His justice, He would have offered that, but He didn't. Instead, only His Son could pay the price for our sins. That tells us both how important we are and how bad sin is.
- E. Once God had done all that work, of course, He didn't keep it a secret. Instead, the gospel was preached to everyone so that everyone could come to God. It wouldn't have made much sense for God to have laid all that groundwork for peace and then not told the sinners who needed peace about the peace they could have. Sadly, many Christians today don't fall in line with God's plan. Judging by their actions, they don't much care whether they keep God's plan of salvation a secret or not. Certainly, they don't tell anyone about it. Let's be honest, folks: is that the treatment that the sacrifice of Christ deserves? If not, we should preach peace too.
- F. Finally, though, Paul presents the results of the work of Christ in vss. 19-22. At first glance, the thing that stands out about this context are the contrasts. We were aliens; now we are citizens. We were strangers; now we're members of God's family. We were useless hunks of rock; now, we are being built together into a spiritual house that glorifies God. There's no doubt that being a Christian is immeasurably better than not.
- G. It's a beautiful picture of what God has done, but we need to pay special attention to what's underneath the structure. The temple of God must be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and with Jesus as its cornerstone. In other words, everything we do must be based on the teaching of the Bible. If it isn't, we aren't God's dwelling place at all. This is the problem that the denominational world has. They build these beautiful buildings; they fill them with thousands of people, but the One who isn't present is God. That can happen to us too, friends, and it's a danger that we must always guard against. There are all sorts of things we can do as a church, but only the ones that God authorizes in His word are pleasing to Him. Remember, friends, from Ephesians 1: the whole point of this is to glorify God. Only obedience does that.

Conclusion. If you want to join God's church, you have to glorify Him by obedience to His plan.