

Clear About the Gospel Bible Study

Ephesians 2.1-10

TEACHING OUTLINE

1. Start with announcements and prayer. (5 minutes)

2. Read aloud Ephesians 2.1-10. (5 minutes)

3. Discuss Paul's emphases upon our spiritual death and God's grace in Ephesians 2.1-7. (15 minutes)

- Two-part passage: Eph 2.1-3 describes our spiritual death, and Eph 2.4-7 describes God's active grace on our behalf
- Passage begins, "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and many sins" (v. 1 NLT)
- Living in sin in v. 2 and 3 comes out of Greek word for "walking" as common way to describe a way of life in NT and in some contemporary expressions ("our Christian walk," "our walk of faith")
- Being spiritually dead much stronger image than how humans usually describe ourselves
 - Drowning in water, going down for final time, until rescued with life preserver
 - Hitting rock bottom with nowhere to go but up, with others coming alongside us to help
- "Dead" means unable to contribute anything to spiritual rebirth/renewal/rescue/redemption, following the ways of evil, our own desires, and Satan: old triumvirate of "world, flesh, devil"
- Ephesians 2.4 has one of the important "buts" in Scripture: "But God..." (NLT, ESV, NRSV)
- God's initiative and action, through his grace and mercy, gives us life, raising us to new life with Jesus and uniting us with him
- Grace: unmerited, undeserved love and favor shown to us, even though we do not merit or deserve it; comes strictly from God's mercy that can only be explained by his great love
- Often humans are suspicious of such grace and mercy: "What's the catch?" All other belief systems, religions, and philosophies put much more weight on human action, choice, worthiness

4. Discuss Paul's linkage of grace and faith in Ephesians 2.8-9 and why it is so significant. (10 minutes)

- Grace appropriated by faith alone, not human effort or ability: "not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (2.8b-9 ESV)
- So grace and faith a compound gift, so that both the mercy and the ability to receive the mercy are gifts from God; believe because God enables the ability to believe
- Not a matter of "God forgives, I trust, and together we make this work as I do my part and God continues to supply grace" (Roman Catholic way of blending justification and sanctification)
- Faith more than intellectual, although it includes it: more about trust, obedience, commitment
- Human default thinking is our ability to do good (or obey God) enough to get over threshold and thus deserve whatever blessing the next life/world entails; but Paul clear this is not the case

5. Discuss Paul's explanation of why we are saved by grace through faith in Ephesians 2.10. (10 minutes)

- Tendency in circles impacted by American evangelicalism to think that the primary reason for being saved by grace through faith alone is “eternal fire insurance,” protection for the next life
- Make a decision at some point on one's life (youth camp or religious service)? You're good!
- Much different motivation and methodology shown in Eph 2.10: those saved by grace through faith described as intentional new creations by God: “God's workmanship” (ESV), “God's masterpiece” (NLT), “God's handiwork” (NIV)
- New creations for a purpose: to do the good works (“good things” NLT) for which we were originally designed before the Fall
- New creation will reach its fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth yet to come (Rev 21-22, for example), but it starts now with purposeful, joyful living in service of the triune God

6. Close with prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- Ephesians 2.1-10 is one of the most famous passages in the New Testament, so you've probably read it before. But read it aloud and try to hear it as though you were a first-time listener. Then describe in summary form what the passage says about you and about God.
- Ephesians 2.1 starts with “Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins” (NLT) or “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.” (NIV) How does this Biblical description compare to how most of us—non-Christian and Christian alike—see ourselves?
- God intervenes in our lives, according to Ephesians 2.4-7. Please describe this intervention in your own words. What does he do? How does he do it? Why does he do it? What is different because of it?
- Define grace. How does Paul emphasize it so much in Ephesians 2.8-9? Then define faith. How is faith more than intellectual knowledge? What else does faith cover? What do grace and faith work together to accomplish, according to Ephesians 2.8-9?
- The default setting on “how to get right with God” for most humans is our effort and accomplishment. How does Ephesians 2.8-9 blow this out of the water? Are there places where human effort and accomplishment can legitimately show up?
- Think about a typical day in your daily life from breakfast to bedtime. How much of the time do you operate on the premise of “only by grace through faith, not by works”? How much of the time do you operate on the premise of “I'm a pretty good person compared to most, so I'm okay”? How do you move toward living more by the first thing and less by the second thing?
- What “good things” (Ephesians 2.10 NLT) do you think you've been put on this earth by the triune God to do? Are you doing some of them now? What are they? What are some you have yet to start but you know God is leading you to do so?