

LESSON ONE**DEAD IN OFFENSES AND SINS BUT SAVED BY GRACE****TO BE THE MASTERPIECE OF GOD**

Scripture Reading:

Eph. 2:1 And you, though dead in your offenses and sins,

Eph. 2:2 In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience;

Eph. 2:3 Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest;

Eph. 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Eph. 2:5 Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Eph. 2:6 And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,

Eph. 2:7 That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 Not of works that no one should boast.

Eph. 2:10 For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them.

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QUESTIONS:

SECTION 1

1. What can we see from Ephesians chapter 1 & 2?
2. What is the difference between the book of Romans and Ephesians?
3. What are the offenses? Please give some examples.

SECTION 2

1. What does “this world” refer to in verse 2? What is the strong sign that people are dead in offenses?
2. What are the three realms that we are saved from? What is the goal of God’s salvation?

SECTION 3

1. Why do we need God’s mercy and what is the result of His mercy toward us?
2. What is the significance of us being raised up together with Him?

SECTION 4

1. What is grace and what does it do for us?
2. What is faith and how do we have faith in us?
3. What is God’s masterpiece and why does it express His wisdom and design?

[Section 1]

DEAD IN OFFENSES AND SINS BUT SAVED BY GRACE TO BE THE MASTERPIECE OF GOD

In this message we come to chapter 2 of Ephesians. We have seen that there is no mention of God's mercy in chapter 1, because everything there is excellent. But chapter 2 describes a miserable situation, a situation that requires the rich mercy of God. In this message we will be concerned with the first three verses of chapter 2.

Actually, Ephesians 2 is concerned not mainly with the pitiful situation of fallen man but with the producing and building of the church. At the end of chapter 1, we see the church as the Body of Christ being produced out of the transmission of the ascended Christ. This is the church seen from the positive view, the view from the top. But we must see not only the view from the top but also the view from the bottom. In chapter 1 Paul looks at the church from the viewpoint of the heavenlies. From this perspective the church is the issue of the transmission of the ascended Christ. But in chapter 2 Paul looks at the church from the bottom, the church from the viewpoint of the miserable situation of fallen man.

I. A CONTINUATION OF CHAPTER 1

Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins." Grammatically, "*and*" indicates that the thought in the last sentence of chapter 1 is incomplete. The last verse of chapter 1 reveals that the church, the Body of Christ, was produced by Christ through His attainment. Now chapter 2 unveils the background, the realm of death, from which the church has been brought forth.

In chapter 1 the apostle Paul speaks many excellent things. He says that the church comes into being through the wonderful transmission of the ascended Christ. In chapter 1 Paul talks about Christ and the power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him in the heavenlies far above all, in subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. But as we have pointed out, there is another side to the church. There is the side of Christ, and there is also the side of ourselves. Therefore, in 2:1 Paul says, "And you." The church has not only the

aspect of divinity but also the aspect of humanity. In chapter 1 we see that the church is the issue of divinity transmitted into us. In chapter 2 we see that the church comes out of humanity. The conjunction "*and*" at the beginning of 2:1 is significant in bringing together these two aspects of the church.

II. DEAD IN OFFENSES AND SINS

A. Dead Spiritually

Verse 1 says that we were dead in our offenses and sins. The words "*though dead*" refer to the dead condition of our spirit, a death that pervaded our entire being. We were not only fallen and sinful; we were dead.

Because the book of Romans deals with sinners, it does not emphasize the fact that fallen people are dead. Instead, the emphasis in Romans is upon sins and sin. But the emphasis in the book of Ephesians is on death, on dealing with dead people. The salvation revealed in Romans is salvation according to righteousness. According to Romans 1:16-17, the gospel of God is powerful unto salvation because God's righteousness is revealed in it. In Romans God saves us by, through, and with His righteousness. In Ephesians, however, God saves the dead with life. Righteousness does not benefit the dead ones. What they need is life. Many Christians are not clear about the difference between salvation through righteousness and salvation through life. For this reason they use Ephesians to illustrate salvation through righteousness. As sinners and dead people, we needed both righteousness and life, both the salvation in Romans and the salvation in Ephesians.

B. Having Lost the Function That Enables Us to Contact God

By being dead in offenses and sins, we lost the function that enables us to contact God. Spiritual death has annulled the function of our spirit. No matter how active we were in our body and soul, we were deadened in our spirit, unable to contact God.

C. In Offenses and Sins

Verse 1 of chapter 2 says that we were dead in our offenses and sins. Offenses are acts that overstep the limit of one's rights, and sins are evil doings. It was from such a background of death in our offenses and sins that we were saved to be the

church, the Body of Christ. The dead have been made alive to be a living organism to express Christ.

We need to say a further word about offenses. In running a race, you must stay within the lines. To go outside the lines is to commit an offense. You have the right to run within the lines, but if you run outside the lines, you overstep your rights.

Years ago, I was helped by a certain brother who had been learning the lessons of life. One day he testified that, after having been enlightened by God, he realized that if he knocked at someone's door and no one answered, he had no right to enter the room. To do so would be to overstep his rights. I was greatly helped by this testimony. Thereafter, whenever I visited someone's home, I limited myself to the room in which I had been asked to be seated. I did not presume to walk around in other parts of the house. To do that would be to overstep my rights and commit an offense. Others, however, may think nothing of walking through someone's home and even of examining the various things there. Although they may justify their behavior, in the eyes of God, they are overstepping their rights.

Suppose after the meeting a brother leaves his hymnal on a chair. Do you think you have the right to handle it? No, you do not have this right, unless you are responsible to clean the hall or to collect lost items for lost and found. Even if you do have the responsibility to pick up items in the meeting hall, this does not mean that you have the right to look through the brother's hymnal.

In the eyes of God, we have overstepped our rights many times. Hence, we were those dead in our offenses. Furthermore, we were also dead in sins, in evil doings such as lying and stealing.

[Section 2]

III. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE AGE OF THIS WORLD

Referring to our offenses and sins, verse 2 says, "In which you once walked according to the age of this world." This world refers to the satanic system, which is composed of many ages. The word age here refers to a part, a section, an aspect, of the system of Satan, particularly the present and modern appearance of that system, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose. When we were dead in offenses and sins, we walked according to the age, the modern appearance, the present course, of the world, the satanic system.

All the time that we were dead in offenses and sins, we were very active in the world, in the realm of the satanic kingdom. The Greek word translated "world," *cosmos*, means "a system." This is neither a divine nor a human system; rather, it is a satanic system. This system, the world, is composed of many ages, each of which is a section of the satanic system. Every age is also a course. For this reason the King James Version adopts the rendering "the course of this world." Every age has a certain style and appearance. The world appeared to Abraham in one way, to David in another way, and to Paul in still another way. Today the world also has its modern appearance. Furthermore, the age of the world has a tide with a current. Once we walked according to the current of the present age. When people follow the trend of the age, this is a strong sign that they are dead, that they are corpses carried along by the current of the age.

One day I passed by a creek that flowed down the slope of a hill. The creek was full of dead leaves that were being swept along with the current. Among the leaves some little fish were swimming upstream against the current. Because the fish were full of life, they could swim against the current; but because the leaves were lifeless, they could only be carried away by the current. They did not have the life to withstand the current and go against it. As long as anyone follows the present current of the world, he is dead. The reason the current of the age can carry so many people along with it is that they all are dead. Throughout the world, in every country, the people are dead. Therefore, whenever the tide of the age comes in, they are swept along by it immediately. Once we also were dead and carried away by the tide of the age, but now that we have been made alive, the current cannot move us.

IV. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE RULER OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE AIR

When we were dead in our offenses and sins, we were not only active in following the age of this world; we also walked "according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience." The ruler here refers to Satan, the prince of the rulers and authorities in the air mentioned in 6:12. The spirit, in apposition to the authority of the air, refers to the aggregate power, the aggregate of all the evil angelic authorities, over which Satan is the ruler. This aggregate spirit is now operating in the sons of disobedience. But we, who once were sons of disobedience, have been saved to be the church.

Above us there is the sphere ruled by Satan, the ruler of the authority of the air. Not many Christians have an adequate understanding of this evil power in the air. The entire earth is under the domination of this spirit in the air. This evil spirit, this evil atmosphere, is the cause of crimes, murders, and even suicides. It influences people to do evil things, which, as humans, they would not normally do. The source of this evil is in the spirit, the atmosphere, which dominates them. This spirit is now operating in the sons of disobedience, in those who are disobedient to God.

V. CONDUCTING OURSELVES IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH

We have considered two of the realms in which we were active when we were dead in our offenses and sins—the realm of the world and the realm of the aerial authority. Now we need to consider the third realm—the realm of the lusts of our flesh. Verse 3 of chapter 2 says, “Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” The word whom in this verse refers to the sons of disobedience, and the word we refers to all believers, both Jewish and Gentile. When we were dead in our offenses and sins, we also conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires not only of the flesh but also of the thoughts. Three evil things—the age of this world, which is outside of us; the ruler of the aerial authority, which is above and within us; and the lusts of our flesh in our fallen nature—dominated our lives. From these evil things we have been saved to become the Body of Christ.

Before we were saved, we all conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, doing whatever the flesh and the thoughts liked to do. The word desires in verse 3 refers to our likes. In the past we did certain things simply because we liked to do them. If we liked to go dancing, we went dancing. If we liked to attend sporting events, we attended them. If we liked window shopping, we went window shopping. Today’s young generation, probably more than any generation in history, does whatever it likes. If you ask the young people why they do certain things, many of them would answer that they simply like to do them. This is a sure sign of a dead person. In doing whatever they like, many of today’s young people are like cars without brakes. How dangerous this is!

The likes of the flesh in verse 3 refer to evil things, and the likes of the thoughts refer to things that may be somewhat better. But both are a sign of being deadened in the spirit, especially in the conscience. When someone is deadened in his spirit, he does whatever his flesh and his thoughts like to do.

VI. BY NATURE CHILDREN OF WRATH

In verse 3 Paul says that we were “by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” We, as the sons of disobedience, were also the children of wrath. In the realm of death we were under God’s wrath because of our disobedience. But we have been saved both from our disobedience and from God’s wrath.

VII. SAVED TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST

We have seen three realms in which we once were active: the age of the world, the evil atmosphere around the inhabited earth, and the lusts of our flesh, including the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. The world is outside of us, the lusts are within us, and the evil spiritual atmosphere is both above us and within us. It is impossible for dead people to escape from these three realms. By nature all men are sons of disobedience and children of wrath, under God’s judgment. When we were dead in offenses and sins, this was our condition as well. Praise the Lord that the church has been brought forth from such a realm of death! We have been saved to become the Body of Christ. Now we are no longer in these three realms; instead, we are in Christ, in the Spirit, and in the heavenlies.

Ephesians 2:1-3 gives a clear description of our condition according to our fallen nature. When we were in that condition, we were dead in offenses and sins, yet very active in the age of the world, under the domination of the atmosphere of the air, and in the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. This is the black background over against which we see the church. The church has been brought forth out of such a miserable source. Hallelujah, although we were dead and in such a deplorable condition, we have been saved to become the Body of Christ! What a salvation!

[Section 3]

VIII. GOD BEING RICH IN MERCY

Verse 4, which tells us that God is rich in mercy, begins with the words “But God.” This was the turning factor in our position. We were in a

miserable situation, but God came in with His rich mercy to make us suitable for His love.

IX. GOD'S GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US

God is rich in mercy "because of His great love with which He loved us" (v. 4). The object of love should be in a condition deserving love, but the object of mercy is always in a pitiful situation. Hence, God's mercy reaches further than His love. God loves us because we are the object of His selection. But we became pitiful by our fall, even dead in our offenses and sins; therefore, we need God's mercy. Because of His great love, God is rich in mercy to save us from our wretched position to a condition which is suitable for His love.

X. EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN OFFENSES

God's mercy reached us even when we were dead in offenses (v. 5). We did not deserve anything from God, but God had mercy upon us in our miserable situation.

XI. MAKING US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

Verse 5 says that we have been made alive together with Christ. The book of Ephesians does not consider us sinners as does the book of Romans; it considers us dead persons. As sinners we need God's forgiveness and justification, as revealed in the book of Romans. But as dead persons we need to be made alive. Forgiveness and justification bring us back to God's presence to enjoy His grace and participate in His life, whereas making us alive enables us, as the living members of the Body of Christ, to express Him. God made us alive by imparting His eternal life, which is Christ Himself (Col. 3:4), into our deadened spirit through His Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). He has enlivened us with Christ. God enlivened us together when He enlivened the crucified Jesus. Therefore, He made us alive with Christ.

As a parenthesis in verse 5, Paul says, "By grace you have been saved." Grace is free. Here it denotes not only God freely dispensed into us for our enjoyment, but also God's action in freely saving us. By such grace we have been saved from our wretched position of death into the marvelous realm of life.

XII. HAVING RAISED US UP TOGETHER AND SEATED US TOGETHER

Verse 6 says, "And raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." To make us alive is the initial step of God's salvation in life. Following this, God raised us up from the position of death. To be made alive is one thing, and to be raised up is another. Consider the story of the raising of Lazarus as an illustration (John 11). The Lord firstly made him alive and then raised him up out of the tomb. In the same principle, God's mercy firstly made us alive and then raised us up from the dead.

A. In the Heavenlies

Verse 6 says that we have been seated together in the heavenlies. The third step of God's salvation in life is to seat us together in the heavenlies. He not only raised us up from the position of death, but also seated us in the highest place in the universe.

The heavenlies are the high position into which we have been saved in Christ. In the book of Romans, Christ as our righteousness has brought us into such a state that we may be acceptable to God. In the book of Ephesians, Christ as our life has saved us into such a position that we may be above all God's enemies. The church people today are in the heavenlies.

The word "heavenlies" is rather peculiar. It refers not only to a place, but also to an atmosphere with a certain nature and characteristic. God's salvation by life has brought us into a heavenly place and into a heavenly atmosphere with a heavenly characteristic. When we meet together, we often have the deep sense that we are not in an earthly atmosphere, but in a heavenly atmosphere. However, if you go to a theater or some other worldly place, you will have the sense that you are immersed in an earthly atmosphere. Because we are in a heavenly atmosphere with a heavenly nature and a heavenly characteristic, we are a heavenly people. God's salvation has transferred us into such a realm and atmosphere.

B. In Christ Jesus

It was in Christ that God seated us all together, once for all, in the heavenlies. This was accomplished when Christ ascended to the heavens, and it was applied to us by the Spirit of Christ when we believed in Him. Today we

realize and experience this reality in our spirit through faith in the accomplished fact.

Both Romans and Ephesians indicate that we are in Christ. In Romans, however, to be transferred from Adam into Christ is primarily a matter of being placed into a justified position. However, in Ephesians to be in Christ is not only a matter of a heavenly position, but, even more important, a matter of life. Because we are in Christ, we have the vitality of life. In Romans Christ is the righteousness of God, but in Ephesians Christ is life. Therefore, according to Romans, to be in Christ means to be in a justified position; but according to Ephesians, to be in Christ means to have the vitality of life.

XIII. THE SURPASSING RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE

Verse 7 says, "That He might display in the ages which are coming the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The church is produced in the present age; the ages which are coming are the ages of the millennium and eternity future. To display the riches of God's grace is to exhibit them to the whole universe publicly. The riches of God's grace surpass every limit. These are the riches of God Himself for our enjoyment. They will be publicly displayed for eternity.

Verse 7 says that the surpassing riches of God's grace are in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Kindness is a benevolent goodness which issues out of mercy and love. It is in such kindness that the grace of God is given to us.

[Section 4]

XIV. BY GRACE

Verse 8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." The word "for" at the beginning of this verse gives the occasion for God to display His grace (v. 7). Because we have been saved by His grace, God may display it.

Many Christians consider salvation as merely being rescued from a pitiful situation. According to this understanding, to be saved by grace is to have the Savior, who is rich in mercy, reach down to us in our low estate and rescue us. But this is not the salvation revealed in Ephesians. According to Ephesians, salvation is the transmission of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ into us. When this Person comes into us as grace, we are saved.

Once we receive such a divine transmission, we are made alive, raised up, and seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Therefore, in Ephesians grace is the saving Person of Christ Himself. Hallelujah for such a salvation! This is a deeper understanding of salvation by grace.

It was not a simple matter for God to be transmitted into us as grace. He had to be processed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. By being processed in this way, He is now able to transmit Himself into us. When the processed God is transmitted into us, He becomes the saving grace. This grace is not only the amazing grace; it is the abounding grace. Grace is the processed God transmitted into our being.

Do not regard this as a mere human interpretation. If you read Ephesians 1 and 2 with much prayer, you will see that God processed and transmitted into our being is the saving grace and the abounding grace. We have been saved by the transmission of this processed God.

As we have indicated, this grace has surpassing riches. It has many aspects, virtues, and attributes, such as life, light, and power. Apart from life, light, and power, God cannot save us. For example, how can you rescue a person who has fallen into a pit if you do not have the strength to lift him out? Furthermore, if you do not have love for him, you will not bother to save him. In order to save us, God needed love and wisdom. These are some of the surpassing riches of God's saving grace. In His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, God has saved us by His grace. In the ages to come—in the millennium and eternity future—God will display this grace publicly to the whole universe.

XV. THROUGH FAITH

In verse 8 Paul says that by grace we have been saved through faith. Faith is the substantiating of invisible things. It is by faith that we substantiate all the things Christ has accomplished for us. Through such substantiating ability, we have been saved by grace. The free action of God's grace saved us through our substantiating faith.

Speaking of faith, verse 8 also says, "This not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Faith is not of our works, nor of our endeavor or strife; it is of God's gift that no one should boast (v. 9). Faith is not of ourselves. Although we believe, the faith with which we believe does not originate with us. In ourselves, we do not have any faith. However,

at the time we repented and made confession to God in the name of the Lord Jesus, the believing ability was put into us. Before we were saved, we were utterly unable to believe. But on the day we were saved, faith was imparted to us, and we believed. Others may ask how we can believe in Jesus Christ when we have never seen Him. Although we have not seen Him, we cannot help believing in Him. This faith is not of ourselves; it is part of the grace transmitted into us.

Faith actually is an aspect of Christ. This is the reason the Bible speaks of the faith of Christ (Rom. 3:22). In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." Faith is Christ Himself. When some hear me say this, they may think that for me Christ is everything. That is right. The faith which is given to us is the faith common to believers (Titus 1:4). Faith is given, faith is received, and faith is common. When we put all these facts together, we see that this faith is Christ Himself.

If there is a beautiful diamond in front of you, you will spontaneously appreciate it. This appreciation does not originate with you, but with the diamond. In a sense, your appreciation is the diamond itself. You certainly would not have the same appreciation for a piece of clay. A diamond is worthy of appreciation; clay is not. Likewise, the reason we do not put our faith in Socrates or Confucius is that they are not believable. But because Christ is absolutely believable, we put our faith in Him. Our faith in Christ does not come out of us; rather, it comes out of Him. When we see Christ, faith is imparted to us. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to say that faith is Christ. This is like saying that holiness, love, righteousness, patience, and endurance are Christ.

Because the unique faith is Christ Himself, we who believe in Him have a common faith. You do not have one kind of faith and I, another kind. When Christ came to you, you believed; and when He came to me, I believed. Whenever Christ comes to a person, that person believes in Him. This is a further indication that faith comes not out of us, but out of Christ.

Because faith is a gift of God and is not of our works, none of us has the right to boast. On the contrary, we all must humbly say, "Lord, if You had not come to me, I would not have any faith. But praise You that You have come, and I have received faith! Lord, You are my faith."

XVI. GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

We have been saved by grace through faith to be God's masterpiece. Verse 10 says, "We are His workmanship." This word may also be rendered "masterpiece." The Greek word *poiema* means something which has been made, a handiwork, or something which has been written or composed as a poem. Poetry does not consist only of poetic writing; any work of art that expresses the maker's wisdom and design may be considered a poem. We, the church, the masterpiece of God's work, are the highest poetry, expressing God's infinite wisdom and divine design.

God has made many things, but none of them is as dear, precious, valuable, and desirable as the church. The church is God's masterpiece. Writers, composers, and artists often attempt to achieve a masterpiece, an outstanding work. God created the heavens and the earth, but neither the heavens nor the earth is God's masterpiece. Likewise, God created man, but not even man is God's masterpiece. Only one item of God's work in this universe is His masterpiece, and this masterpiece is the church. As God's masterpiece, the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. What could be a greater work than this? Furthermore, the church as God's masterpiece is the corporate and universal new man (2:15).

XVII. CREATED

A. In Christ Jesus

Verse 10 says that we are God's workmanship "created in Christ Jesus." As the masterpiece of God's work, we, the church, are an absolutely new item in the universe, something newly originated by God. We have been created by God in Christ through regeneration to be His new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

B. By the Mingling of God with Man

God's masterpiece is absolutely new because it is the mingling of God and man. We may also say that the church is a hybrid, the blending together of two lives. God's masterpiece, His greatest workmanship, is the working of Himself into man and the constituting of man into oneness with Himself to produce the church.

References:

