

Ephesians: God's New Family

| Date | Weekly Theme | |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| January 7 | Ephesians 1 | <i>All things belong to God</i> |
| January 14 | Ephesians 2 | <i>Radical Grace - People made for a purpose</i> |
| January 21 | Ephesians 3 | <i>The Servant Family</i> |
| January 28 | Ephesians 4:1-24 | <i>Family Unity</i> |
| February 4 | Ephesians 4:25-6:9 | <i>Living a new life</i> |
| February 11 | Ephesians 6:10-24 | <i>Family Armor</i> |

Small Group Time

Take time to greet each other, share names if necessary, and share your highs, lows, and prayer concerns. Then take time to pray for one another.

Read the text aloud – **Ephesians 2:1-9** (Differing versions if possible)

What did you hear?

What, if anything, caught your attention?

How does the overall message impact you?

Authenticity Determining Factors

5 Factors for Authenticity

Structure (Blessing and Thanksgiving)
 Vocabulary (words used, length of sentences, terms)
 Theology
 Situation of the letter
 Writing Style

Ephesians 2:1-10**Group Discussion**

The author begins this passage by writing, “You were dead...” What do you think he means by this? How could we be dead?

And what do you think the author means by saying in verse 3, “... and we were by nature children of wrath, like everybody else?”

What does it mean for the author to then say that God has “made us alive?” If we were dead, how then are we alive? What does it mean to be alive?

Why has God made us alive? For what purpose?

Letting This Text Speak

- To grasp the power of this text, one must understand that this was written at a time when membership in the church was only a fractional percentage of the population.
- Within a backdrop of Roman power and Greek culture, and in an environment that was becoming more and more hostile to the church, the words of this epistle were written. “You were dead... but God has made you alive!”
- The condition of being dead is expressed in a way that emphasizes that “being dead” was our condition and rightfully should have remained our condition.
- When Paul writes about the “wrath of God,” he is not talking about a violent eruption of anger that belongs in some apocalyptic movie. For Paul, the wrath of God is God simply letting us have what we want. It is God abandoning us to the beds we make for ourselves.
 - Question: *So what are the beds we make for ourselves in which we lie dead?*
- In the Greek manuscript, all of verses 1-3 comprise a complex series of clauses in just one sentence that set up the contrast that completes the sentence – ***But God...!***
 - God, rich in mercy...
 - God, out of the great love with which he loved us...
 - Even when we were dead through our trespasses!
 - Note the astonishing significance, within the Jewish matrix out of which Christianity emerged, of God messing with the dead!
 - The dead are hands-off people!
 - But not with God...!
 - God made us alive together with Christ!

- This is one of the key tenets of our faith – Justification. We believe that we are justified by grace through faith..
- The verb tense of what God has done emphasizes that it is over. It has already been accomplished.
 - By grace you have been saved!
 - In all instances, “you” is plural.
 - You have already been raised up with Christ and seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
 - Question: *How can the author speak about this as if it has already been done? Aren't we still living on this side of heaven?*
- Why did God do this?
 - So that God **could show** the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. So that God could show that God is God! The cross is God making God's case.
- Now the author wants to be sure that we really get this: ***For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.***
 - *What is grace?*
 - *What does grace mean to you?*
 - *Does the church emphasize grace too much?*

□ It is a gift.

| |
|--|
| God's Riches At Christ's Expense |
|--|

- *If we are really saved completely by grace, then why does what we do in this life matter? What's the point?*
- *If God's saving grace is unconditional, then doesn't that cheapen the cross of Jesus?*
- Grace is God's undeserved mercy that transforms sinners from death to life.
- We are made alive by God coming to us in Jesus' life death and resurrection
- God 's love continues to be revealed in the world through our witness

- The purpose?
 - ***For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.***
- How can it be made profound enough...
 - You and I were dreamed up in the mind of God with a purpose for our existence.
 - We have a reason for being here.
 - We weren't put here to just take up space, air, and resources.
 - But instead we have a holy and divine calling...
- Which is good news in a culture that tells us that our purpose, our reason for being, is grounded in our cultural value which is based upon our...
 - Proficiency at producing and consuming goods and services.
 - If you are a stay-at-home mom (aka domestic engineer), look no further as to why what you do has so little cultural support.
 - It's because this work produces intangibles...things that are innately difficult to measure.
 - And yet economists have gone to the trouble to calculate the value in dollars of what stay-at-home mom's do for the economy and have arrived at figures in the billions of dollars.
 - Attractiveness and charisma...
 - Our wealth...
 - Our ability to be successful...
 - The success of our children...
 - The success of our spouse...
 - Our intelligence...
 - Our education...
 - Our wellness...
 - Our social status and circles...
 - Our color and race...
 - Our sexuality...
 - And what else?
- So how profound to come to an awareness that who we are and what God is up to in our lives and the very reason and purpose that he has for our lives isn't grounded in these fickle subjective value judgments.

- **God's original purpose for us as created beings was to be...**
 - In relationship with him, and
 - To be in the co-creative processes of life.
 - Notice from the second creation account in Genesis (2:4b and following) that the first human vocation *was not* prostitution! It was gardening! As the NRSV says, God placed "the man" in the garden to tend and keep it...
- It is the usurping of God's purposes for our lives that is "original sin."
- And since those times as our Judeo-Christian *mythos* goes, this sin of usurping God, wanting to be God, wanting to deny that God gets to be God and we don't, has in some way, shape, or form comprised our human rebellion against God.
- This is what Ephesians 2:1-3 is speaking about...these things are an outgrowth of this.
- But this is the radical nature of Grace.
 - God ultimately does not let us have our own way (totally).
 - We make decisions.
 - But because God is also free (more so than us), God may do and has done everything in God's power to assure that we, God's precious creation, will be reunited with his initial vision for our existence.
 - **God made us for a holy purpose.**
 - And Jesus was the restoration of that vision for our lives and the very life of creation.
 - Jesus as a human being was the incarnate example of a human life joined to the purposes of God.
 - And so we are to be a creation Alive! with God's purposes for our lives shaping the texture of our existences.
 - Ephesians 2:4-7
 - God does this work of restoration through Jesus out of *God's* freedom; God's holy response to our unholy rebellion.
 - Ex. Holy wrenches used for unholy purposes...
- So it is that in Jesus, we are reconnected to God's intentions for our lives...as individuals, and as a community.
- For the purposes of accuracy...we need to keep in mind that the address of this letter is to the church herself, and not to individuals per se.
- That said...our transformed identity comes to us first as individuals in the waters of baptism as we are made dead to be made Alive! again in Jesus Christ. Through this resurrection we are joined to the resurrected people of God.

Questions for Reflection and Digestion

What has God made us?

What are these good works that we were made for?

And why are they to be our way of life?

*How do these things then shape how we understand ourselves;
As individuals...*

And as community...

- Things to note:
 - These works that we do, they are God’s creation; an extension of his purposes for our lives *through us!!*
 - They do not save us.
 - They do not justify us.
 - They do not make us holy or right with God.
- But these works are...
 - An extension of God’s love.
 - How it is that *we become* an extension of God’s love for the world.
 - A community that is a living sacrament to the world, i.e. Grace that uses as its means of conveyance ordinary, flesh and blood, flawed and imperfect, people like you and I.

Ephesians 2:11-22

- **One in Christ**
 - Jesus makes peace between Jew and Gentile to unify all people in the church.
 - There is only one unified people of God
 - Circumcision was a sign for the Jews that an individual was outside the covenant people of God
 - The new covenant (Jesus) fulfills all the divine promises of prior covenants
 - Abrahamic
 - Mosaic
 - Davidic
 - The old division of all people into two classifications (Jews and Gentiles or Jews and Greeks) has been transcended by a new entity in Christ – **“the church of God”**
 - “in his flesh” refers to Jesus’ death on the cross (v. 14).
- The opposite of peace is hostility
 - On the cross Jesus put to death the hostility between Israel and all other nations
 - Paul describes Christ’s reconciliation as “killing the hostility.” (v. 16)
 - To draw near to God and to enjoy him in a new creation is both humanity’s greatest good and the ultimate accomplishment of Christ’s work on earth of redemption – one Spirit.

- As Christians our faith informs us that we are “no longer strangers” but members of the household of God – saints.
 - Paul uses “strangers” and “aliens” that were common terms in those days.
 - They would have understood this as ones with no rights and/or protection. Only citizens had these characteristics and privileges.
 - The holy temple is where God meets with the people in joyful worship and fellowship. Believers do not have to worship in Jerusalem today because they themselves have become the new temple of God. God resides with them.

Questions and Processing

For further contemplation:

Respond to these statements and questions:

*Jesus did not come to simply let us off the hook but to let us in on Him?
What will you do with what you have heard today?
How will you re-appropriate your life?*

For next week

Read Chapter 3 and address the following questions:

What do you think is Paul’s reason to be a prisoner for Christ Jesus?

What would a church look like if they were all known as prisoners for Jesus?

What is life like daily for us and our peers?

How is it that we feel imprisoned at times?

How often do we bump into the things of Christ, or catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God?

Are these things coincidences or God-incidents?