



ONE CHURCH

EPHESIANS

Ephesians 2:1-10
Lesson 3—God's Masterpiece

January 2, 2022

Introduction

We live in an age where “branding” has become a trite phrase. It means “self-promotion.”

Today, everyone “promotes themselves.” They tell about the good things they do through elaborately staged Facebook and Instagram posts. They ensure you know their latest accomplishment, their newest outfit, and their ideal vacation.

It's all about “look at me.”

It has infected the church where “marketing” takes center stage. We need to “market the church” to the world to hear the gospel. The world needs to experience how

wonderful we are, how friendly we are. We promote programs and events that draw attention to us.

Honestly, we believe we are drawing attention to God, but it is easy to lose God in the noise of activities.

God had a different way of getting the world to notice him. It still has to do with the church, but it doesn't take out a Google ad or post on Facebook.

It is more complicated than that. But if the world sees what God is doing, they will be intrigued.

Let's find out God's plan to get the world's attention.

Discussion

Who We Were

Ephesians is about God putting together one church of different people so the world will know his power.

In this lesson, Paul describes a before and after picture and puts us in the mirror. Something dramatic happens.

The first three verses use charcoal colors to paint our dim position in the world.

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3, ESV)

In this passage, the term “walk” is the bookend of the section. This first part describes how we conducted our lives before Christ entered them.

Our spirit had the stench of decomposition. The future was no more. No life was there.

Paul uses the conjoined twin words of “trespasses and sins” as his mirror. The terms indicate many things. One is a slip or a fall by the wayside. Sin strays from the road because we ignore we are drifting. We know better but choose poorly.

My daughter had a first-grade teacher who reminded her students, “Use your good judgment.” Paul said when it came to our spiritual lives, we didn’t. We knew better but did it anyway.

Paul wants us to face what sin is—the failure to be what would be and ought to be. We are either unable or unwilling to become what God intends. So, we are always short of the mark.

But where does this come from? It comes from a diversion.

Who distracts you the most? You might blame TV or someone who wants to always talk to you. The truth is we are the ones for most of the distractions. We start thinking about things we need to do, and then our mind jumps to another topic.

Paul says we followed all the spiritual values and beings of the world as a dog responds to a dog whistle. But why? Don’t we know better? Sure we do, but that’s not the point. In the same way, we are the one who distracts ourselves.

As Paul says, we follow this course that continues to work in those who are disobedient because of “the desires of body and mind.”

We often let those words direct us to the seedy places, the filthy spots. We are much too sophisticated, too refined to engage in all of those “dirty sins.”

But sin doesn't always have an ugly face with a wart on its nose. You can wear makeup, dress in tuxedos, and play tennis. Ladies and gentlemen are sinners because they are at the whim of their desires.

When Paul described the "works of the flesh" (a word he uses in our lesson today), they are not all sensual or immoral things.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21, ESV)

Do you get angry? How about things like character assassination?

Let's get more base. Are there people in this world you don't like? How do you treat them? Do you call them demeaning names? Do you share the post that inflames passions and makes others angry? Do you wish others did not have what they have because "people like that don't deserve it"?

All of the ordinary things of life, the traps all fall into are covered. The respectable sins such as gossip and looking down at others lurk in the shadow of desire.

All are because we want something. We want to look important, better. We want more money, more status, more of the world like we want it.

Welcome to the "desires of body and mind" like the rest of mankind.

The best of us are not better than the worst of us. And none of us can climb out of the pit we fell into.

It takes something else...it takes God himself.

What God Did

In verse 4, you feel a hard U-turn with the word "but."

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved—” (Ephesians 2:4-5, ESV)

What did God do for us? He made us alive with Christ.

It is a word that can mean “raise from the dead” in the same way Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb. It goes even further. We come to life, but we are also sustained in life from that moment forward.

But it is “with Christ.” We are joined with Christ to come alive. It harks back to Paul’s statement of Romans 6 of “dying and being buried with Christ in baptism” and then being “raised with him.” The method is to identify, go to the grave, and come back with him through his resurrection.

We are not only cleansed of past sin through God’s plan, but we are sustained in this new life through God’s plan. In short, God doesn’t make us better. He makes us new.

But how did this happen?

It doesn’t happen on our own. It is through God’s mercy and grace.

God sees the helplessness of man and knows how to save him. Mercy is when you see something so pitiful and know you can change that.

Grace is a word that becomes trite but never with God. He gives a treasure that can never be repaid. It is a favor never able to be returned. In fact, it is more than that.

Grace describes the despicable being treated with kindness. It means that when someone so unworthy is given a gift despite himself. We don’t get what we deserve and get what we don’t deserve.

It is what caused God to choose Abram. Not because of his worthiness, but because he believed.

Israel became God's chosen people despite their disobedience and stubbornness. They were not better than all or richer than neighbors. They brought no status to the table. They were God's chosen people simply because God chose them. It was the privilege of love, not the position of superiority.

The propelling force of the change is not us. In these verses, God is the actor. He gives grace and the overabundance of mercy. We are a pathetic child freezing in the cold brought into the mansion to live.

Paul does not want us to miss the point, so he emphasizes it.

**"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
(Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV)**

Does Paul say we are passive? He says that faith showed in obedience is the channel through which grace flows. As a pipe carries water to thirsty people, faith carries grace to lost people.

But don't confuse the pipe with the water. It is the gift of God, not what you do. None of us earn salvation. In fact, if we could, God would let us alone. He only takes in the hungry and needy, not the self-sufficient.

He says, "don't get on your soapbox and tell people how good a person you are that God just wanted to have you."

When my wife was in a college dorm room, a stray kitten came by one year at the end of the semester. She and her roommate fell in love with the kitten and brought it into the room because her roommate would give it as a Christmas gift to her sister.

There was one problem. As cute as the cat was, it had ringworm. All that means is those who handled the cat got ringworm as well.

God picked up a stray kitten with your name on it. God still picked us up despite the disease we had.

What difference did it make?

In a single word, Paul captures it. "He saved us." Saved, that word walked over so often we don't see it, describes the effect. Paul uses a tense that emphasizes what happened and the state or condition we are in due to God's action. We are saved in God's grace as we stay as we remain in God's grace.

But Paul is not finished describing our transformation.

"and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," (Ephesians 2:6, ESV)

Not only does he take in the stray and clean him up, but he also puts him in the privileged place of a child in his palace. He makes us sit down in his presence.

The story is what Jesus tells in Luke 15 of the runaway son who deserved nothing but trouble. When he finds himself among the pigs, he comes to himself and decides to return home and be a servant. The boy will have something to eat and somewhere to live, but it won't be in the main house with the family. He's willing to take that lowly but stable status.

But when he arrives home, his father runs and hugs him. He refuses to listen to his prepared speech of mea culpas. Instead, he puts a son's robe and a son's finger on him. He brings him into the house and sits him in the chair of honor as he feasts with him.

We deserve the servant's quarters, and that would be enough. Instead, God takes us and sits us down in the heavenly places, somewhere we could never be on our own.

What Was God Doing?

But the question “why” lingers like smoke after a fire. Why would God take someone so consumed with themselves and shower them with love undeserved to make us so clean, so fresh, and so new?

Paul wants us to know the answer to that. God has a motive behind all that he does. His ultimate reason is to get all men back to him and in fellowship with him. The problem is most people don’t notice. He wants them to see something of what they could be.

In the final verse of this lesson is the reason.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10, ESV)

God had a plan, prepared long before Christ came. He wanted something to happen.

He had a second creation for man to do “good things,” not follow their nature. He wanted to change the way they lived in dramatic ways.

If God can show how people’s lives can be so changed, perhaps others will open their hearts to listen in their despair and desperation.

In this way, he makes us his “workmanship.” Do not ignore this word because it describes God’s true motive in saving us.

The word Paul uses is a word that means “work of art.” It could describe the plays of Shakespeare, the Mona Lisa, or Longfellow’s poetry. It is something that people look at, linger over, and admire.

Art does something to us. It captures our imaginations in a way that we cannot turn loose. We wonder how anyone could make something so beautiful, so sublime?

They should be of the character that causes people to say, "how could God do that?" And perhaps they may respond with, "I wonder if he could do that to me as well." This is what God's change of our lives is to be.

But in Ephesians, it means even more than personal change. Remember that Ephesus was a blended city and, the church, by extension, was a blended church. It was filled with slave masters and slaves. Men and women. Jews and Gentiles. Rich and poor.

If God could change the human tendency to hate each other, despise those not like us, feel superior over those we detest and put them together in a church, it would get the world's attention.

If these people had changed enough to care for each other, build each other up, love each other, forgive each other, and stop seeing the differences and see the kinship, might not the world want the same kind of change?

This is the portrait of his people God wants to paint. Changed people living together with Jesus as their head reaching out to those who are untouchables. That's a picture you never see hanging in the world's gallery filled with hate, rivalry, and self-serving.

Conclusion

God wants the world to know him and obey him through faithful obedience to his son. How does he do that? He reaches down to change the ugly into beauty. He takes them from being accursed to being blessed.

He showers us with grace undeserved and mercy sorely needed.

And he wants the world to see the change in us and take notice of the art he had created with the blood of his son.

Too many times, we put what “we do as a church” on display rather than “what God does to us” on display. Are we to show our importance or God’s power? It is subtle because we cleanse our motives and see ourselves as purer than we should be.

If people see great programs among average lives, they will yawn and say, “another paint-by-number life.” Instead, God creates a masterpiece out of the ashcans of our lives. God wants to display the changed life he makes by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. He wants to show his great power in the church.

Can all of the redeemed come together to show what God has done?

A few years ago, the holiday sounds were unusual.

Four hundred musicians ranging from a nine-year-old cellist to an octogenarian oboist assembled to play a new piece of music.

And none had a suitable instrument.

There were bows with little hair and a trumpet held together by blue painter’s tape.

David Lang brought them to Philadelphia’s 23rd Street Armory to perform his piece Symphony for a Broken Orchestra.

Lang found another way to make a melodic sound with funds cut to schools.

The sound started at the atrocious. The French horn could not hold its mouth-piece. As the work progressed, the instruments blended into a harmonizing sound. The music ended with each instrument going silent one by one. The last note was a squeak by a dilapidated clarinet.

We expect the best, the shiniest, the most expensive. Standard orchestra contain tuned woodwinds and dynamic brass. Tympani and gong are the best available.

Who brings broken instruments into an orchestra?

God does in something called “the church.”