

This is a Great Mystery

A Study of Ephesians

Week 9 – Ephesians 2:3-5

Prayer

Almighty God, whose Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path, open and enlighten our minds so that we may understand your Word purely, clearly, and devoutly, and then, having understood it correctly, pattern our lives according to it; through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

From Last Week

The first two verses of chapter two lay out the sinful state of mankind. Verses 3-5 take that depravity even further but then pivot to the astounding nature of God's grace.

Verse 3 – ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἤμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί·

...among them we also all once behaved in the passions of our flesh, as we did the desires of the flesh and the mind, and we were, by nature, children of wrath, as the others are, too.

1. Notice that in these verses, we find a reference to what Luther would call the “Unholy Trinity:” the devil (ruler of the air in v 2), the world (age of this world in v 2), and the sinful flesh (basically all of v 3).
2. Paul switches from second-person verbs (you) to first-person (we). What effect does that have, especially in a section where the law is pretty heavy?
3. There's a pretty interesting dictionary entry for ἀνεστράφημέν, the word translated here as “we behaved.” It says, “Live in the passions of the flesh = be a slave to physical passion.” That's a strong connotation. What from this verse (or elsewhere in Scripture) supports that definition?
4. Look at what Jesus says about the “cravings and desires” of the flesh in **Matthew 15:18-20**.
 - a. Paul gives another list of the “works of the sinful flesh” in **Galatians 5:19-21**.
 - b. Paul uses yet another list of “natural” sins in **1 Timothy 1:8-10**.
 - c. There are certainly other sections that drive home this point: **Genesis 6:5; Genesis 8:21; Psalm 14; Psalm 51; Romans 3; Romans 5; Galatians 3**; among others.
 - d. According to those verses, is there anyone excluded from being a slave to passions and desires?

5. Interestingly, the word τέκνα (children) gets skimmed over in some translations. They simply say that we are “deserving of wrath,” which is true, but is a little less literal. Jump inside the translators’ minds; what are some possible explanations for using “deserving of wrath”?
 - a. What might be communicated through “children of wrath” that isn’t communicated through “deserving of wrath”?
 - b. In the end, this is another case where both can be right; but one is more literal, the other is more of what we would call a “dynamic equivalent.”

What comments and questions do you have?

Verses 4-5 – ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, 5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, — χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loves us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive with Christ—it is by grace you have been saved.

6. A few notes on the Greek word order: where a word or phrase is placed matters, especially when it comes to where the emphasis is directed.
 - a. Here, the emphasis is placed on God (θεός) by putting him at the front of the sentence.
 - b. Then, everything that describes him (rich in mercy; he has great love, even though we were dead in trespasses) comes before the verb, which isn’t until the sixth-to-last word (συνεζωοποίησεν).
 - c. Simply put: God is the focal point, just by looking at the word order; the content of these verses will also focus on God as the doer and show that we merely receive the benefits of his action.
 - d. Another feature of the Greek is that God and the “made alive” verb are actually the main subject and verb of the sentence that runs from verse 1 to verse 7.
 - i. So, verses 1-3 build up the pressure of guilt in a poetic way; verse 4, beginning with “But God, who is rich in mercy,” serves as a relief to the reader.
7. Why didn’t Paul simply say that God is merciful? What changes when you hear “rich in mercy”?
8. We see three words that can be used interchangeably to speak about how God treats us with an undeserved kindness—mercy, grace, and love. I mentioned this in a sermon back in March on this text; and I think I’ve brought it up at other times. Let’s see if anyone can recall what the differences between each of these characteristics is:
 - a. Mercy –
 - b. Grace –
 - c. Love –

9. We've already talked about how we were dead in trespasses; let's talk about being made alive with Christ (συνεζωποίησεν).
- a. By the way, this συν- root means "with." Last week, I briefly touched on a series of verbs that use this prefix and also link us to Christ; here's the start of that list.
 - b. Turn to **Romans 6:4-14**, where Paul gives a little more detail as to what being alive with (or in) Christ means.
 - i. What has to die in order for us to be made alive with Christ (v. 6)?
 - ii. By what means does this death take place (v. 4)?
 - iii. What does it mean to be dead to sin, as opposed to dead in sin (v. 11)?
 - iv. What happens, then, as we live our lives as those who have been made alive (v. 12-14)?
 - c. So, why aren't we perfect and sinless, if we've been made alive from the dead?
 - i. This is where a lot of "holiness" churches go wrong. They tend to forget that saints are still sinners. We still struggle. In fact, one of the ways we can tell we are alive because we struggle! We don't just blindly run into sin; we have guilt and shame, which does its work on our hearts so that we can be reminded of God's grace, as Paul does here in Ephesians 2.
10. It's almost as though Paul is so excited to write about grace that he slips in the phrase at the end of this verse; we will talk more about the "by grace you have been saved" phrase in v. 8.

What comments and questions do you have?

Closing Prayer – Blessed Are the Saints of God - v. 1 and 2

Blessed are the saints of God;

They are bought with Christ's own blood.

They are ransomed from the grave;

Life eternal they shall have.

With them numbered may we be

Here and in eternity.

They are justified by grace;

They enjoy the Savior's peace.

All their sins are washed away;

They shall stand in God's great day.

With them numbered may we be

Here and in eternity.