

Notes And Helps to Instructors

Thank you for volunteering to lead a group through the treasures of God's word! You may feel overwhelmed or inadequate, but you can do this! The leader notes are designed to help you grow in knowledge and love for Christ and for you to help pass what you have received to your group. Here are some suggestions to help equip you to grow in your teaching and leading ability.

- These lessons could simply be read, and a group would receive something but that is not how they are designed. The notes are designed to grow you as a leader so you might tailor the lesson for the needs of your group. Some groups may not have much of a knowledge base in the bible, so the concepts must be brought down to their level. Other groups may have a large knowledge base and you may challenge them with more information. The key is to know your group. If you begin leading a group in one way and find that it is not connecting, it is alright to modify and bring down or raise up the level of information.
- The more preparation you do the stronger you will be as a leader. Let the study material be a joy for you! Let it feed you as you prepare! The more you are fed the more you have to give to your group.
- There is no set time on how long a lesson may take. Lessons could be slowed down and take several weeks to finish. Perhaps in leading a group, one question captivates the group and leads to a fruitful conversation. If that happens, that is good! You are in no hurry. If you can finish the material in a week, then great! But if it takes several, that is great as well! The important thing is that they receive deeply from the gospel of Jesus.
- Pray about your lesson! Pray as you prepare! Pray as you teach! Remember we do not teach or exercise our gifts in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who opens the heart and mind. Pray for the Spirit to move in your heart and the heart of the group.

May our merciful Triune God bless your study and your group that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

In Christ,

Prison Discipleship Ministry

Lessons in Salvation -- Lesson 6

Introduction:

We have said that the word “gospel” means good news of salvation. In the next two lessons we want to fully understand the wonder of what God does for us in Christ when we believe the gospel. This week we begin by looking at Ephesians 2:1-3. In the next lesson we will look at 2:4-10.

Read this passage at least five times then answer the questions as best you can:

NKJ **Ephesians 2:1** And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:1-10 NKJ)

According to Eph 2:1-3, what are the five characteristics of humanity that God must overcome to save a sinner?

What does it mean that we were “dead in trespasses and sins? (v. 1)” How is that different than being dead in a cemetery? Don’t we have free will?

What does it mean that we “once walked according to the course of this world? (v. 2)”

What does it mean that we “walked according to the prince of the power of the air? (v. 2)” Who is the prince of the power of the air? How do we walk according to him?

What does he mean in Eph 2:3 when he says, “we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”?

What does he mean when he says that we were “by nature children of wrath, just as the others? (v. 3)” What is wrath? Whose wrath is he talking about? (Read Romans 1:16-32 for further explanation of “wrath.”)

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According to Eph 2:1-3, what are the five characteristics of humanity that God must overcome to save a sinner?

1. We were dead in our trespasses and sins (v. 1)
2. We walked according to the course of this world (v. 2)
3. [We walked] according to the prince of the power of the air (v. 2)
4. Conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind (v. 3)
5. [We] were children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

What does it mean that we were “dead in trespasses and sins? (v. 1)” How is that different than being dead in a cemetery? Don’t we have free will?

It means that although we have physical life, unlike those in a cemetery, we do not by nature have spiritual life. And because we have no spiritual life, we have no desire or ability in us by nature to seek salvation from God.

All readers of the bible throughout history have had to come to terms with the fact that Paul says that we were all “dead” in our trespasses and sins. Some believe that dead here means that though we are dead, we still have a small amount of life where we, by our own free will, can reach out to God for salvation. We are more critically sick than spiritually dead. This is known as the Armenian view. Some believe that man is at the core good, but we are dead because we follow Adam in trespasses and sins. Adam’s fall did not affect our wills and spirit so we can, by our own free will, reach out to God, because at the core we are good and able to do so. This is known as the Pelagian view. Neither of those views are biblically true.

The biblical view, however, is that man is spiritually dead. He has no desire or ability to reach out to God unless God reaches out to him first and regenerates him (regeneration is the bringing of our spiritually dead heart to life where we can see our sins and call out to God in repentance and faith.)

But what about free will? Do we, have it? The answer is no. We do not have a “free will” as our will is in bondage to sin, death, and the devil. We do however have “free choice.” Here is an example of what that looks like: In prison, you have a multitude of choices you make every day. You could wear this shirt and not the other shirt, this pair of socks not the other pair of socks. You could go to the library or work out. You could work or not work. You could receive a visitor or read a book. You have thousands of free choices you make every day. What is the one choice you cannot make? You cannot get out of prison! All of your free choices are made due to the fact that you cannot leave the prison. That is what our free choices are like in our bound will. We make free choices every day. They are our choices, so we are responsible for them. But all our choices will be in keeping with our will that is either bound in sin and death, or alive in Christ. So, because we are dead in our trespasses and sins, we cannot and do not desire to come to Christ for salvation, unless God comes to us in his mercy and brings our dead hearts to life (regeneration) to see our sins and call out to Christ in repentance and faith.

What does it mean that we “once walked according to the course of this world? (v. 2)”

“Walk” in the scriptures refers to our conduct. It is how we move on our path. See for example Ephesians 2:2, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17. 5:2, 5:8, 5:15 and compare it also with “conduct” in Ephesians 2:3 and 4:22.

The course of this world refers to the world system. It is what the world values and the value system the world has, what they see as important, the goals for life, what the meaning and purpose of life is, what is true, lovely, honorable, moral etc. It is the principles that guide a person’s life come from the values of the world and not from God and what he values.

What does it mean that we “walked according to the prince of the power of the air? (v. 2)” Who is the prince of the power of the air? How do we walk according to him?

The values of this world is that man is God. Man is the ruler of our lives. And that sounds like the serpent's last temptation to our first parents Adam and Eve in Gen 3:6, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Ephesians 6:10-13 tells us that we are in a spiritual battle:

"10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

In this life, we do not only fight against our sinful hearts, but we also have a real spiritual enemy. The devil is real and wants to render us ineffectual and unfruitful in our lives. Verse 12 reminds us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

When we walk according to the course of this world, that means we walk according to the prince of the power of the air. The world's values are his values. When we follow the world, we follow Satan's powers. 1 John 2:15-17 helps make this clear, "15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world-- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life-- is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

God promises us that when we follow him, he will help us stand firm and be strong in him as we live in this world. God has not promised us however, that he will remove the struggle of this life. Romans 7:14-25 helps us see the struggle clearly in Paul's own life.

"14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. 15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

What does he mean in Eph 2:3 when he says, “we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”?

The flesh is our own sinful desires. “Desires” refers to the lusts we have in our hearts. So, we conducted ourselves seeking to please the lusts of our hearts whether lusts carried out by our physical body or in our mind.

Galatians 5:17-21 tells us clearly what the works of the flesh are,

“19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 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.”

The Serpent wanted to be God, and he tempted man to follow his own desires to become God, and by fulfilling our desires we would be God. Gen 3:4-6, “4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

What does he mean when he says that we were “by nature children of wrath, just as the others? (v. 3)” What is wrath? Whose wrath is he talking about? (Read Romans 1:16-32 for further explanation of “wrath.”)

Wrath is God’s good, right, just, and loving response to sin. A God that does not have wrath against sin, injustice, and evil is not a good and loving God. And by nature, our fallen nature in Adam, and because of our sins; being dead in our trespasses and sins, we are children of wrath, just like the others (all humanity).

Consider Romans 1:16-32:

“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God

or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

This passage tells us the condition of all humanity. We all find ourselves in the list in vs 28-32. We are all by nature children of wrath; rightfully deserving that wrath. We all stand guilty before the barre of God's perfect righteousness and deserve the fullness of his justice.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus takes the full wrath of the Father against our sins and gives us by faith in him his perfect righteousness. Consider Romans 5:6-11,

“6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Christ did not die for good people. He died for sinful people, ungodly people, those who were his enemies and justly deserving the full wrath of God. But notice verse 9, “Since, therefore, we have no been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Because of the work of Christ, the penalty for sin has been paid. By faith in Christ, he takes our wrath and gives us life. God, in Christ, saves us from his wrath by putting his son in our place. Sin has been paid; God is just. And so, God can now show his mercy to those who look to him in faith. Romans 3:21-26 makes this beautiful reality so clear,

“21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”