

EPHESIANS

Chapter 2

“The Holy But”

Paul writes this letter to believers as God’s designated hitter during a colossal transition in how God deals with sin. The hinge of history is the crucifixion. Let’s call the centuries *before* the cross “the (predicted) Age of Law” and these two thousand years *since* the cross “the (unpredicted) Age of Grace.”

God the Father’s standard of sinless perfection is so unattainable that only the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, would justify His forgiving all the sins of mankind, once and for all (Romans 3:21-26, 4:7-8). God loves fallen man so dearly that He set aside all religious rules and rituals, and credited to every individual His Son’s victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). That victory becomes our when we receive it by faith. Let’s read this paradigm-shifting chapter, Ephesians 2:1-22 (p. 1174, NIV).

Stuck in Sin

2:1-10

As Adam and Eve’s kids, you and I were born *spiritually dead on arrival*. Doomed as sinners, we’re unable to seek, respond to or please God. A corpse can’t be tempted by even the juiciest offer.

Thankfully, throughout the Bible God has planted some beautiful “but’s” (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 73:26, Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 5:6-8, 1 Corinthians 1:26-27, 1 John 5:9-13). Like the cavalry to the rescue, these holy “but’s” arrive just in time as we suddenly hear “But God!”

When we were spiritually dead, God *gave* us faith to believe Him. We can take no credit for being “born again!” If we could, we’d gloat. If you boast, you roast. Salvation is not a *reward*; it’s the ultimate *GIFT* (Romans 3:27-28; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31).

Because God has declared the believer to be “in Christ,” when Jesus rose from the dead, we too were raised to new life with Him. When He returned to heaven, we also sat down at the Father’s right hand. God did this to showcase His no-holds-barred love for you and me!

DISCUSS: Why do we balk at accepting something that’s free?

To describe the believer as God’s new creation, Paul uses the Greek “*poiema*” for “*workmanship*,” the root of “*poem*.” You are God’s *divine poem*, an original, His masterpiece! Really now, what “work” does a poem do? It reflects the mind and heart of its creator.

The Greek for “*do*” in verse 10 (“good works which God prepared in advance for us to *do*”), means “*to walk about in.*” Paul’s just been writing about *whose* good works ...that we should walk around in?

DISCUSS: What are some of Christ’s good works?

Separate but Same 2:11-13

God had kept hidden His “secret” (or “mystery”) Gospel until Paul announced it long after Pentecost. Gentiles were not God’s *chosen* people as was Israel, nor were believers called “The Church” or “The Body of Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:2-7, 4:4-6).

Peter preached “*the gospel of the circumcision*” to the Jews, and Paul served up “*the gospel of the uncircumcision*” to Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10). Peter exhorted Israel to “*repent and be baptized*” to have their sins forgiven so that the ascended Christ would hastily return and set up His kingdom on earth. Paul targeted Gentiles, praying that his fellow Jews would be jealous and accept Christ (Romans 10:19-11:11).

The Gentiles had no Messiah, no special privileges or promises which Jews enjoyed. As pagans, they had many gods but did not know the one, true God, thus had no hope of life after death. Again that awesome, mercy-rich, holy “BUT” reappears (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)! BUT, thanks to God’s Son’s sacrifice on your behalf, you have now been brought not only “near” Christ but placed “in” Him!

DISCUSS: Define “the secret.” Why was it a secret (Galatians 3:1-29)?

Side by Side 2:14-18

In the temple in Jerusalem a curtain walled off the “Holy of Holies” where, *before* the cross, the high priest met with God. This wall was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died (Luke 23:44-46).

This symbolized that only “in Christ” could two enemies make peace with God and with each other. No longer at odds, together we are God’s *temple*, housing His Spirit.

Jesus ended the legalistic system that had stiff-armed outsiders (Galatians 3:10-14; Hebrews 8:6, 9:15). He came to earth and lived sinlessly, meeting all of the Law’s demands, freeing us from that impossible expectation (Galatians 5:1-6, 6:12-16).

DISCUSS: Why did God give, then set aside the Law (1 Peter 1:10-12)?

Not Strangers but Saints 2:19-22

Alec Rowlands writes in *THE PRESENCE*, “Only in relationship with God and each other do we find out who God is and who we truly are.” No longer undocumented aliens, we’re His Church; Jesus is the Cornerstone. Until He returns, we’re to demonstrate Christ alive in us individually and together as His Church (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Recently a well-known religious leader said it’s dangerous to believe one can have "a personal, direct, immediate relationship with Jesus without communion and the mediation of the church. Remember,” he stressed, “being Christian means belonging to the church.”

But our Lord said faith is about His Spirit, not church affiliation or location, telling a Samaritan woman, “... *you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks*” (John 4:19-26).

The Bible is the *sole* authority for spiritual Truth. Jesus credited the Old Testament and His Father as *His* only authorities (Matthew 4:1-11). Paul adds, “... *the Holy Scriptures ... have the power to give you wisdom so that you can be saved through faith in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture passage is inspired by God ... useful for teaching, pointing out errors, correcting people, and training them for a life that has God’s approval. They equip God’s servants so that they are completely prepared to do good things*” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

No human broker is required for us to have a “personal relationship with Christ,” Paul states, “... *there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Yet, that aforementioned religious leader’s news service equates its mission with “the mission of the Church itself – to spread the Gospel” by reporting “what readers need to know in order to work for salvation.” Paul calls this “spiritual blindness.”

“Do You Have Some I.D.?”

Legalism says you must *do* something to earn or purchase God’s gracious welcome into His family. BUT GOD always initiates; we respond. His Son sacrificed His life to give us a new identity as God’s adopted sons, brothers in Christ and citizens of heaven. Knowing who *God* says you are is your key to every circumstance. Have you claimed your new identity in Christ yet? It’s yours for the taking, already paid for in full. No ifs, ands or buts.

His Deal

www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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