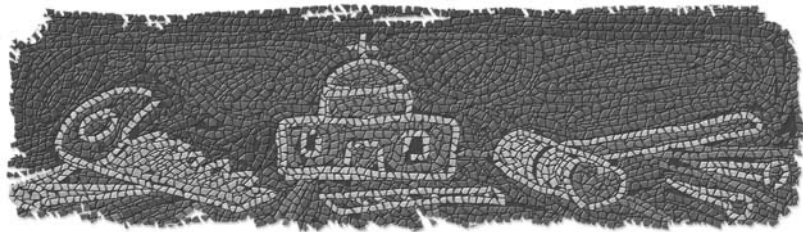


The Church: God's Workmanship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 3:24-28; 6:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:12, 13.*

Memory Text: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (*Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV*).

Frenchman Michael Foucault once advocated tearing down all prisons and letting the prisoners go free. Why? Mssr. Foucault believed that concepts of morality, or right and wrong, good and evil, were purely human constructs, human inventions created by people in power in order to keep other people down. Therefore, taking his beliefs to their logical conclusion, he stated that even the idea of criminality was a human invention, and thus all the prisoners should be set free.

However extreme his idea, it's indicative of the prevailing sentiment in many places that there is no such thing as sin and that such ideas as morality and right and wrong are mere opinions, nothing more.

This week's lesson—though ending on a hopeful and positive note—begins with a clear expression of the reality of sin and the inevitability of its consequence: death (which is hardly a human construct, to be sure). This week, let's see what Paul has to say, not only about evil but also about the only solution to it.

The Week at a Glance: Before Christ, what was our condition like? Why and how did God show us grace and mercy? What does being God's workmanship involve? How are we saved?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.*

Dead in Sin (*Eph. 2:1-3*)

From the time Adam and Eve chose to follow their own will instead of God's, sin has become the lot of the human race. "Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (*Rom. 5:12, NKJV*). And because sin is universal (*Rom. 3:23*), death is also.

How do the following texts help us understand the nature of sin?

Isa. 59:2

Rom. 14:23

James 1:15

1 John 3:4

Ephesians 2:2, 3 tells three things about unbelievers. First, they lived "like the rest of the world" (*vs. 2, NLT*) in disobedience to God and disunity among themselves. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God (*James 4:4*), and as enemies they lived a life of darkness and alienation. Second, they followed "the prince of the power of the air" (*Eph. 2:2, NKJV*). The prince is Satan. Jesus called him "the prince of this world" (*John 12:31*). While some would dismiss Satan as a myth, the Bible tells us he is a reality—"a roaring lion," out to devour God's people (*1 Pet. 5:8*), and an "accuser of our brethren" (*Rev. 12:10*) who leads men and women to disobey God (*Eph. 2:2*).

Third, they are corrupt and "by nature children of wrath" (*vs. 3, NKJV*). Sin corrupts everything—mind, thought, action, desire, will, etc.—and, as such, their nature is depraved and within them there is a perpetual conflict. This spiritually corrupt and bankrupt nature makes sinners the "children of wrath" (*vs. 3, NKJV*)—children deserving God's judgment.

So, what is the status of unbelievers? They are dead in sin. They have sealed their own fate by choosing to live "the desires of the flesh" (*vs. 3*) and becoming children subject to God's wrath. They are dead—dead in a sense of finality, humanly speaking.

Look up James 4:4. What does it mean to be "a friend of the world"? How are we, as Christians, to understand this important point (after all, to be a friend of the world is to be at enmity with God), especially in light of John 3:16, which says that God loves the world? Prepare to discuss your answers in class.

Key Text: *Ephesians 2:1-3*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that evil and sin are real things, not illusions.
2. To demonstrate the human responsibility for evil and sin and their consequences.
3. To understand that only God in Christ is the solution to the problems of sin and evil.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Reality of Sin (*Eph. 2:2*)

- A. Evil exists objectively, apart from our opinions of what it is or is not.
- B. Evil is the result of evil actions, or sin.
- C. The results of sin can be seen clearly in the human and natural world.

II. Missing the Mark (*Eph. 2:3*)

- A. Sin entered the present world as a result of Adam's and Eve's disobedience.
- B. Death, both spiritual and physical, is the inevitable result of sin.
- C. All people who sin are, in a real sense, dead in their sin.

III. But for the Grace of God . . . (*Eph. 2:4*)

- A. Everyone since Adam and Eve has been a participant in, or victim of, sin.
- B. God in Christ has delivered us from sin and thus made us alive in Him, as long as we exercise faith.
- C. Christians, both as individuals and as a community, come to their current saved status by grace alone, nothing more.

Summary: Evil is an ever-present reality in our world, and all of it can be traced to human sin at some point. This reality is so unpleasant that many people today choose to ignore its existence or refer to it by other less grating terms. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and death continue to exist, and only God can save us from them.

COMMENTARY

Our study this week presents a dramatic and powerful movement: from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from aliens to God's workmanship. The central figure, as always, is Christ, who has "quickened" us "who were dead in trespasses and sins" (*Eph. 2:1*) and made us "his workmanship" (*vs. 10*). Ephesians 2:1-10 introduces the making of God's family on earth. Paul describes this making in three steps: what we were, what God has done for us, and what we are today.

I. What We Were (*Eph. 2:1-3*)

Remembering the past is a good thing. It provides an appropriate context for review of the past and reflection of the present.

“But God . . .”

Paul was a master in conveying God’s great truths. In Ephesians 2:1-3, He describes the pathetic plight of unbelievers: dead in sin, slaves of Satan, walking according to the lusts of the flesh, condemned as children of wrath, hopeless and destitute, unable to save themselves. In verse 4, the apostle introduces the glorious alternative available to this pathetic lot in two dramatic words, “But God.”

These two words may be among the Bible’s most beautiful words. We were dead, “but God”; we were rebels, “but God”; we were under judgment of death, “but God”; we were aliens and strangers, “but God”; Satan may seem triumphant, “but God.” As long as those two words are in biblical vocabulary, we have hope.

Look up the following texts and note how the phrase “but God” is used: Psalm 73:26; Acts 13:29, 30; Romans 5:7, 8; 6:16, 17; Philippians 2:27. What hope is seen there for us?

Why did God come forward to deliver us from the bondage of death? Why did God choose to rescue us from the clutches of sin? Why didn’t He let Adam and Eve perish in their choice? Why didn’t He make Himself new creatures who would love and follow His way?

The apostle provides two answers. First, because God “is rich in mercy” (*Eph. 2:4*). Mercy is intrinsic to the nature of God: “(‘The Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you’” (*Deut. 4:31, NKJV*), for “He is good! . . . His mercy endures forever” (*Ps. 106:1, NKJV*). Mercy is so important to the salvation process that the redeemed are called “vessels of mercy” (*Rom. 9:23, NKJV*).

Second, “because of His great love with which He loved us” (*Eph. 2:4, NKJV*). God’s love—selfless on the part of the giver, undeserved on the part of the receiver—is the motivation for giving “His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16, NKJV*). God’s “gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 9, p. 190.

Write a paragraph that begins, “I [your name] was [talk about your spiritual and mental state before you knew the Lord], but God [now write out what He has done for you through Christ].”

Nowhere is this more true than in understanding the delight of salvation that Christians enjoy in the present.

What was our past like? Note Paul's descriptive phrases in Ephesians 2:1-3: We were dead in sin; we walked according to the world; we were slaves to Satan, fulfilling the desires of the flesh; and, hence, we were under the wrath of God. Not a pretty picture, is it? But that's what we were before coming to Christ: dead; not sick, not dying, but dead.

We can never comprehend the biblical concept of redemption unless we fully understand the biblical teaching of sin. Sin is not a sickness; not a behavioral aberration; not a moral failure; not a psychological deficiency. Sin is a rebellion against God—and in this rebellion, sinners have a faithful ally: Satan, the first rebel. With such an ally as our master, with rebellion against God as our wish and way, we became slaves to sin. To recognize that sinful past is to acknowledge that we were rebels against God, subjects of His wrath, and candidates for the final death. We may follow our lusts, walk in the pleasures of flesh, live as though sin is not real—but we cannot escape the consequence of death (*Rom. 6:23*).

II. What God Has Done for Us (*Eph. 2:4-9*)

Against such a dreadful and hopeless past, and against the finality of death, Paul presents the good news of the gospel. And he begins with a powerful phrase, "But God . . ."

No evil force, no deadly condition, not even Satan can stand against the mighty purposes of God expressed in that phrase. God had set His mind to crush the power of sin and Satan to redeem humanity from sin and death. Nothing less than that purpose and power of God can rescue and redeem the sinner.

Why did God choose to do this? Paul provides five reasons—each a gem that should be inlaid in our hearts: (1) His rich mercy, (2) His great love to us sinners, (3) Christ offering Himself to die for sin, (4) the riches of His grace, and (5) His kindness toward us.

The grace of God through Christ is the basis of our salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (*Eph. 2:8, 9*). "In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

Life outside that grace is a life under wrath, under a death sentence from its own master ("The wages of sin is death" [*Rom 6:23*]). But life under God's grace takes us from the gutters of lust and pleasure to the power of resurrection and the privilege of sitting in heavenly places with Christ (*Eph. 2:6, 7*).

What's more, the entire redemptive process is "the gift of God" (*vs. 8*). Before that wondrous gift, let all human surmising and boasting cease. Here are God's love and grace. Here are Christ's

“Made Us Alive” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*)

When he speaks of God’s grace, love, and mercy toward sinners, Paul repeatedly uses such superlatives as “riches,” “rich,” “great,” and “exceeding.” Such usage shows the supreme value this former Pharisee placed on salvation as God’s gift and not a result of human works. Ephesians 2:1-8 clearly outlines the movement of sinners from death to life.

Read Ephesians 2:5, 6 and note three things God does for us in Christ. The first few words are given to you.

He has “quicken’d us”

He “raised us”

He “made us sit”

In Greek, each of the above phrases begins with the prefix *sun*, meaning “together with.” This indicates that all believers will share these blessings together with one another and together with Christ.

First, He “made us alive together with Christ” (*Eph. 2:5, NKJV*). Those who believe in Christ and die with Him become participants of His resurrection power, and they become spiritually alive together with the risen Lord (*Rom. 6:8-11*).

How have you experienced being “made alive in Christ”?

Second, He “raised us up” (*Eph. 2:6, NKJV*). This raising up in Christ is not without purpose: We are to live for Him. The new life we as Christians enjoy must be a witness to the power of Christ’s resurrection by revealing that power in our life and character.

How have you experienced being “raised up” by Christ?

Third, He “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (*vs. 6*). The Christian’s ultimate privilege will be that of sitting with Christ and reigning with Him (*2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 22:5*). Even now we can be examples to the universe of His enduring love and justice. Even now we can sit in “heavenly places” with Jesus when we, by faith, live in intimacy with Him.

How have you experienced this “sitting together” with Jesus now?

cross and resurrection. Come and taste and enter the heavenly places. And see what God offers you in Christ!

III. What We Are Today (*Eph. 2:10*)

From death to life to God's workmanship—Paul completes the

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:12, 13*

❶ In American Sign Language the sign for dead is to have one hand palm up, the other hand palm down, then at the same time, reverse the position of each hand. Sin has turned our world upside down. We all are dead to what God planned for us. Despite our rebellion, God reached out to set right again what was so wrong. Have your class recite John 3:16, 17 together. Discuss the significance of what God has done. Pray together, asking for a deeper understanding of God's mission on earth and how we each can be involved in fulfilling that mission.

❷ Faced with impossible situations of failure and controversy, we tend to throw up our hands and walk away. But God seeks to offer hope when we feel despair and futility. Why does God want to make us “alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (*Eph. 2:5, NIV*)? What does this tell you about your value to Him? Why is your worth to God so hard to accept?

❸ Superlatives are used to broaden and deepen verbal descriptions. For example, not just *blue water* but *rich, velvety blue*. Discuss the superlatives Paul uses in Romans 3:24-28 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Why was it important to Paul that God justifies freely (*Rom. 3:24*) or grants us “the incomparable riches of his grace” (*Eph. 2:6, NIV*)?

❹ “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves” (*Eph. 2:8, NKJV*). Why is it so hard to accept the “not of yourselves” portion of this text? Is it an inherited or learned trait to be skeptical and to want to do things by ourselves, through our own power? Why is it necessary to receive His Holy Spirit?

❺ We are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (*Eph. 2:10, NIV*). This begins when we take a noticeable stand to be on God's side and under His lordship (*see Col. 2:12*). Why is it so important for human beings to act on what they know? Think back to your baptism (or a baptism you have witnessed). Recount the actual, practical results of such a tangible witness for Jesus.

By Grace Through Faith *(Rom. 3:24-28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7)*

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” *(Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV)*.

These two verses summarize the heart of Paul’s gospel. Paul’s thesis is that grace is God’s part in salvation, faith is the human response, and the entire salvation experience that comes by grace through faith is a gift of God, not of works.

Grace and *faith* are the key words here. How do we understand them?

Grace refers to God’s initiative and the basis of our redemption from sin. As sinners we deserve death, and God offers us life. We are separated from Him and from one another, and He offers us reconciliation. We are under bondage to sin and judgment, and He provides us freedom. We do not deserve any of what He offers, because we have sinned and stand in rebellion against God *(Col. 1:21)*. Hence, grace is often defined as God’s unmerited favor to us.

Grace is God’s sovereign initiative and activity for the salvation of sinners. This grace appeared in the “fullness of the time” *(Gal. 4:4, NKJV)* in the historic event of Jesus Christ—more specifically, the act of Christ on the cross. We have no part in either the conception or execution of salvation. It is God’s gift to “whoever believes” in Jesus *(John 3:16, NKJV)*.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18. How does this text help us better understand the concept of grace? Who did the reconciling, and for whom?

Faith is the human response to God’s provision. In a Christian sense, faith is not a virtue we develop on our own. It is a response of wonder at what God has done to redeem us from sin and a ready acceptance of God’s operating in our lives. Saving faith is a change of allegiance—from self to God, from denial or indifference to God’s claims to unreserved acceptance. Faith opens the heart to the indwelling of Christ. As such, it cannot originate in the carnal heart. It is “the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

How would you help someone who says, “I am just so weak in faith. I believe, but my faith wavers so much”? What practical steps can we take to make our faith stronger? How does what we read, think, and say impact our faith?

journey from the hopelessness of the past to the wonder and responsibility of the present. Christians are no longer under sin, but they are saved. They are now the children of God, and as such are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (*Eph. 2:10*). Paul has already described salvation as liberation from slavery, resurrection from the dead, and a rescue from condemnation. But now he uses creation language. Salvation is not self-correction, not self-creation. Nothing self can do can achieve salvation. It is a result of Christ's creation; indeed, a re-creation, a new creation.

But being re-created by the grace of God through Jesus does not mean that the saved person is freed from all responsibility. God makes His masterpiece of new men and women in order that they may manifest in their lives His will and character. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (*Matt. 7:20*), Jesus said, thus emphasizing that a Christian life does not free us from sin in order that we may

Witnessing

When you love someone, *really* love someone, you cannot seem to do enough for that person. You want to show her or him every good thing in life. You have a burning need to express in every way possible the depth of your devotion. It becomes a driving goal to fulfill your love's every need and desire.

This overwhelming spiritual, emotional, and physical connection to a significant other is exactly how the promise of eternal life affects those who accept God's plan of salvation. They become one with Him; their thoughts and actions reflect His influence in their lives; they are incomplete without Him.

Because God's people feel the intensity of their commitment to Him, they cannot hold the good news in check. It is their belief that His message of redemption must be shared with as many others as possible and at every possible occasion. Acts of love and mercy toward others naturally occur out of such deep devotion and affection for the Lord.

When Christ Jesus takes over the heart, it is impossible to wish harm on others. Offering grace, which is always unmerited by the very definition of grace, is following the Savior's example. When someone this week talks badly to you, meet their anger with a peaceful response. As you are driving the car over the next few days, if someone cuts you off, resist retaliating. Instead, give that person room to move ahead. Look for as many instances as possible to show that you are driven by a different kind of passion—one that desires to soothe, not inflame; one that strives to turn a volatile situation into a redemptive event. Even if your efforts are met with little support, you know that grace and mercy have been extended—you can do no more.

“We Are His Workmanship” (*Eph. 2:10*)

Paul stresses so clearly in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that we are not saved by works. Then, immediately, in verse 10, he says that we were not only “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” but that we were “before ordained” to walk in those good works. Is there a contradiction here? How do you understand what Paul is saying in these three verses?

Paul’s salvation story closes with the affirmation that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (*vs. 10, NIV*). We as individual Christians or as a community of faith owe our existence to God’s grace. We are His workmanship, His masterpiece, His work of art, created in Christ Jesus.

This ought not to be a matter of pride. Paul has warned against such boasting in verse 9: “Not of works, lest anyone should boast” (*NKJV*). Our works, however good and great and lasting they may be, cannot save us. In salvation, self-congratulation has no place. God expects only self-denial, self-death, in order that Christ may reign in our hearts as supreme—without any competitor. “Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. . . . This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 78.

Christians must guard against two fallacies. First, the idea that we need to add something of our own to God’s grace. Second, freedom in Christ frees us from obedience to His claims.

Yes, we are His workmanship. We are a new creation by His grace through faith. But we are new creatures in Christ “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (*vs. 10, NIV*). Does this mean our works are a prerequisite to our salvation? Far from it. But they are a requisite of a saved life. Paul’s appeal is for a life and a lifestyle consistent with the demands of faith. In effect, the apostle is saying: “Yes, you are saved by faith. You are saved by the free grace of God. But you are saved to live. Your faith experience must move from believing to living. You must live out your salvation. That involves a lifestyle of obedience, just like our great model—Christ Jesus—who obeyed even to the point of humiliation and death (*Phil. 2:5-12*). And, furthermore, your Christian walk is your personal responsibility; no one else can do it for you.”

indulge in a life of ease and purposelessness. Salvation turns us into God’s workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works”—that is to say, to reflect God’s works of righteousness in our lives. Good works are not a prerequisite for salvation, but they are a requisite. We are not saved by good works, but neither can our salvation be genuine without good works.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: If you have done any gardening, you may have had a plant that you thought had died only to burst to life in the spring. Have class members share some of their gardening stories. Maybe you have a “black” thumb instead of a “green” one. What is Paul addressing when he says we have been “made . . . alive” (*Eph. 2:5, NIV*) even when we were dead in transgressions? What part does God’s rich mercy play in our spiritual renewal?

Thought Questions:

❶ Sin is ugly, irrational, and contagious. List other adjectives that describe sin. Why do we so easily fall into “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires” (*Eph. 2:3, NIV*) when our descriptions of sin are so detestable? Consider the contrast Paul paints: “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms” (*Eph. 2:6, NIV*). Share your testimony of how the contrast between sin and salvation has compelled you into a personal relationship with Christ.

❷ Have you ever gone to a “free” car wash only to find out those doing the job really expected some type of payment? We have become jaded by free offers that really were not. Perhaps this is why we have a hard time accepting that we have been “justified freely by his grace” (*Rom. 3:24, NIV*). Discuss how you would share this good news with a skeptic. Ask God to paint a deeper understanding of this wonderful grace through you.

Application Question:

We all have heard stories about families in turmoil. A tragic component occurs when a member dies without anyone taking the opportunity to heal the hurt or make right the wrong. “God . . . reconciled us to himself” (*2 Cor. 5:18, NIV*). Using the Bible, do a word study on *reconciliation*. Ask God to help you understand the significance and power of reconciliation. Then ask Him to give you courage to reconcile with someone He brings to mind. How might it affect your local church if every member allowed God to make her or him an agent of reconciliation?

Further Study: *Righteousness by faith alone.* “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. . . . If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy.” —Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

On fruit-bearing. “Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ Galatians 5:22, 23. They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God they will follow in His steps, reflect His character, and purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure. The vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 58.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study about friendship with the world and what that means.
- ❷ As a class, discuss the two Ellen G. White quotes listed above. How do you harmonize the teachings presented there?
- ❸ Talk about this idea of morals and values and ideas of right and wrong being only relative. Are there some ideas of right and wrong that are purely relative, subjective, and personal, or is everything absolute?
- ❹ What can you do as a class to help everyone in your local church better understand the great truth of salvation by faith alone?