

Bible Basics Conference 2009: "Walk Worthy of the Calling!"

Part 3

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[00:00:01] It's probably appropriate to begin our session by reading the verses that we have before us, which are the first ten verses of Ephesians chapter 2.

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1, And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace ye are saved, and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [00:01:03] that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Michael has already alluded to the difficulty that we as speakers face in having a lot to cover in a short period of time and perhaps finding it difficult to know what to focus on in the verses that are before us in each session. But I think the organisers of the conference have given at least this session a helpful title [00:02:03] in summarising the first 10 verses of Ephesians chapter 2 with this title here, God's masterpiece, the material. Now there are perhaps some people in the audience who aren't familiar with the verses that we've just read. Perhaps you've heard them for the first time. And the subject or the title is a helpful summary of what's presented in these verses. But perhaps there are a lot here who are familiar with the verses that we've just read and there are a lot of expressions there that we do refer to a lot and feature in ministry and in gospel preaching. But perhaps if you're in that situation, the title that's been given to this talk will help present these verses in a new perspective. That is the perspective of outlining God's masterpiece and the material that is the working material for that masterpiece.

[00:03:12] So with that in view, the verses can perhaps be broken up in this way or perhaps be summarised by answering these questions. What is the material that makes up God's masterpiece? And that's the first three verses. Next, the question, who is capable of working with that material?

That's answered in verse 4.

What has been done with that material? We'll see that in verses 5 and 6. Why has all of this been done? We have an answer to that in verse 7.

And then how has this been achieved? We see in verses 8, 9 and 10.

And also at the very end in verse 10, we have an indication of what our response to all of this ought to be. [00:04:10] So it may be helpful to start with the question, what is the material? Or perhaps to put it another way, out of all of the things, not only in this world but in this entire universe, out of all of those things which God could have chosen to be the subject of the wonderful work that we're going to read about and the subject of his wonderful mercy, love and grace. Out of all of the things in the universe, what has he chosen? He's chosen us.

And in particular, he's chosen us in the state that is very clearly described in the first three verses of our chapter. He has chosen us even though we were dead.

In the bottom left-hand corner of the slide in the little blue square, [00:05:05] there's some hints of what this expression, dead, towards God might mean.

And it really does cover a range of things. But perhaps the key is that there was nothing in us that wanted to have anything to do with God and nothing in us that was capable of having anything to do with God and nothing in us that was capable of making any change to our condition.

But the first three verses of the chapter also tell us that dead doesn't mean that we had no life or that we had no thought or no autonomy. And there's a verse that's referred to on the slide in brackets [00:06:02] and it's perhaps just a helpful way of explaining this distinction that I'm trying to draw here. It's a verse that comes from the story of the prodigal son. The son's father describes his son once the son has returned as follows. He says, Luke 15, 24, For this my son was dead and is alive. Now obviously his son wasn't literally dead, but he was dead to his father because he had spurned his father and more than that adopted a course of life which was entirely foreign to his father's desire. And there was nothing in the son that had any inclination towards his father. So that's why his father could say that he was dead. Similarly for us, when we were dead towards God, [00:07:01] we were, however, engaged in a course of conduct of our own choice. We walked in trespasses and sins, walked according to the conversation of this world, chose to live our lives and have all of our thoughts and conduct and association with the children of disobedience.

And in addition to all of that, we fulfilled our hearts and minds, lusts and desires. We could perhaps adopt the words of Colossians 3, verse 7 and say that we lived in those things while we were dead to God.

There's perhaps not time to go through what each of these things that are mentioned on the right-hand side of the slide cover. But perhaps I can just make this point that they cover a very wide range of things. [00:08:03] To take the first one, trespasses and sins, it's perhaps difficult to know precisely this distinction that the Holy Spirit is seeking to draw there. But one that I've read that I think is helpful is a contrast in referring separately to trespasses and to sins between contraventions of specific commands from God on the one hand and on the other hand, falling short of God's standard. I think that's a helpful distinction because even if we were foolish enough to think that we'd never

contravened any of God's commands, I don't think any of us, honestly, no matter how naive we were, could say that we've never fallen short of God's standards.

And perhaps another point, just to illustrate the breadth of things that are covered here, [00:09:02] it reveals to us not only that our conduct was wrong, but also our thoughts were as well.

Just before going on to the next slide, there's just one practical comment which it might be helpful to make, and it just concerns the course of the world.

Because if you read verses 1 and 2 together, you see that the course of this world is walking in trespasses and sins. And just one of the practical lessons that I think we can draw from that is to ask ourselves, is my conduct similar to that of the world? Or perhaps to put that another and perhaps more helpful way, if my conduct is no different from the conduct of the world, then there's something wrong, or I need to look at my conduct. Because the conduct of the world is trespasses and sins, [00:10:04] and that ought to be entirely foreign to me now.

The verses go on to also emphasise what we were by nature, and as a result, what we were destined for.

It says in verse 3 that by nature we were the children of wrath, deserving of wrath, and that was something inherent in us.

That was by nature what we deserved.

And the verse also says that we were like that as others.

There was nothing to set any of us apart from anyone else in the world. [00:11:01] Nothing to set any of us here apart from any of those who have gone to spend eternity in hell.

And just a few final points on these verses. The things that are described, I've perhaps emphasised this already, in verses 1 to 3 are true of all of us, and that's clear when we again look at the precise language that's used in these verses. This has been alluded to already, that there's reference to you, the Apostle Paul, there speaking to the people to whom he was writing, Gentiles. But Paul also in verse 3 refers to we, the converted Jews.

So Jews and Gentiles and, of course, the whole world alike were in this situation.

And it may just be helpful to read the verse that's referred to there in brackets [00:12:03] just to emphasise this. 2 Corinthians 5.14.

Just the expression right at the end of that verse, all were dead.

That's describing what is proved to be true as a result of the work of Christ, that all were dead.

The corollary of these verses speaking to all of us is that they speak to each of us individually or describe each of us personally.

And that's made clear in Mr. Darby's translation of verse 1, which refers to your trespasses and sins.

Lastly and importantly, verses 1 to 3 describe our past state.

[00:13:02] None of the things that are said there are true of us presently. But having said that, it's still possible for us to walk in a manner that's perhaps similar to what's described in the first three verses. Or to put that in a different way, it's still possible for us to walk in a fleshly way. And so that's something for us to be careful about.

Having described all of that, we might then ask the question, who can use such material?

Who can use people who were dead and who had no power in them to change themselves?

The answer quite clearly comes in in verse 4.

And it's wonderful the way that God is presented in this verse and also in the following verses.

[00:14:09] It's also wonderful to see something that's not presented, not mentioned at all in the verses that we have before us. The Bible makes it clear that men are judged according to their works. Matthew chapter 13 is an example of that.

There's also a verse in the Old Testament which uses language similar to that which we had before us. In Joshua 24, at the end of verse 19, it's referring to God.

It says there, he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

Now that's God and that's God's standard. But there's no mention of punishment or of judgment in these verses that we have before us.

[00:15:08] What is presented is the other side of God's character, which we have, I think, very well described in Psalm 103 verse 10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. And that's the character that's emphasised here. Verse 4 presents a God who is rich in mercy.

If we want to know the extent of, or want to have illustrated the extent of God's mercy, we could perhaps turn to the well-known verse, John 3, 16, which tells us that God loved the world. That's the riches of God's mercy, that it covers everyone in the world.

And we also have explained to us in verse 4 that God is a loving God and has a great love for us. [00:16:09] And in Proverbs chapter 10, we have the statement that love covers all sins.

And perhaps the most remarkable thing about God's nature is that this is the nature that he had. These are the feelings that he had towards us, even when we were in our hopeless and dead state. There's some verses in Isaiah that were perhaps alluded to in one of our prayers this morning.

And if my memory serves me correct, they were mentioned a few times at last year's conference. They're Isaiah 55 verses 8 and 9, where it says, or God speaks and says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, and so on. [00:17:03] I just mention that because I think, well, even though those verses, the truth of those verses has a general application, I think what those verses are really directed towards is God's mercy, because that's what's referred to in the preceding

verse, verse 7 of Isaiah chapter 55. So God's mercy is not our mercy, and his ways of mercy are far above our ways of mercy.

And that's the wonderful God who has chosen to work with us even when we were dead towards him.

This theme is continued in verses 5 and 6, where we see what God has done with us, what God has done with the material. And again, it's wonderful perhaps to see some of the things that aren't mentioned in these verses. [00:18:04] And again, these verses don't say that God has dealt with us as we deserved. They also don't say that God has merely set things right, but rather he's introduced something far more wonderful, something entirely new. There's a statement that was made by the late John Guilford Bellet, which might just be helpful for me to read out because it encapsulates this quite well. He said, God never merely repairs a breach, he brings a better thing out of the ruin. I just think that's a wonderful way of summarising what we have here and of summarising what God has done. And the particular things that God has done that are emphasised in verses 5 and 6 of our chapter are that he has quickened us, that is, he has given a new life to us, and he has done this with the Lord Jesus. [00:19:06] God has raised us up, and more than that, he has raised us up and seated us in the heavenlies, and this is in Christ.

In contrast to our previous dead state, this is our present state, a new life, a new position where we're lifted out of this world and at rest or at home in a new place. And this last point, that we are seated in the heavenlies, I think is unique to Ephesians. Some of the other things are alluded to elsewhere in the Bible, but this last one, that we are already seated in heavenly places, is unique to Ephesians.

Sometimes one reads, just in connection with that thought, the statements or statements to the effect that we are in the heavenlies in Christ as our representative. [00:20:12] And that's true, but I think that expression is perhaps liable to misinterpretation.

Obviously we're not literally in the heavenlies in one sense, in that our bodies are still here on this earth, but the verse does say that in Christ we are in the heavenlies, and more than that, that we are seated there. So we're not dealing with something that's merely theoretical, if you like, but something that is true of us now, that that is our proper position.

And in addition to that, there ought to be no hindrance to us enjoying that position now, [00:21:05] and we should enjoy it, and we should also walk according to that, and according to all of the things that we've learned about in the verses that we've got up to so far. The verse from Romans that's referred to there is the one that instructs us to reckon ourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God.

Now there's something again that's been alluded to already that I just want to mention again, because it might be something that's useful for further study, and that is the allusions that can be drawn to Israel crossing the Red Sea, then being in the wilderness, and then entering into the land. Similarities with what are presented there in a typical way, and what we have here in Ephesians, [00:22:04] and what we've just been talking about. Crossing the Red Sea, we might summarise in a very simple and quick way, picturing salvation, deliverance from bondage, being in the wilderness, speaking of being in this world and not being at home, and finally crossing the Jordan and entering into the land, speaking of being seated in the heavenly places, enjoying what God has promised to us.

Having looked at that in your further study, you might also want to look at the different truths that are presented in Romans and Colossians, in addition to the letter that we're looking at today. Romans would correspond to crossing the Red Sea, [00:23:02] Colossians being in the wilderness, and Ephesians entering into and enjoying the blessings in the land.

Now, in all that we've been looking at thus far in this session, we might think that we are the subject of these verses, but really I don't think we are, and we're not. Although we might be the subject of God's work in that we're what he has chosen to work with, we're not the object of it, or at least not the sole object of it, because God has chosen to work with us in this wonderful way to display the riches of his grace, and he wants to do this throughout the ages to come. Now, we've had one coming age referred to already, and that is what we often refer to as the millennium, but there's another age coming after that, which is the eternal state, [00:24:01] and God wants to display the riches of his grace towards us throughout those coming ages. We can't go past the last few verses of this passage, which inform us that we are saved by God's grace through the means or the agency of faith, but also with the emphasis that this is entirely God's gift.

Verse 8 tells us that we're not saved by ourselves and not saved by anything that we have done, and again I just want to read part of the verse that's cited on the slide, Titus chapter 3 verses 4 and 5, [00:25:01] because it says there that the kindness and love of God appeared not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, which we have done, but according to his mercy, backing up and emphasising and reinforcing the truth that we have presented in these verses here.

Verse 10 tells us that the new state that we have received is something altogether new. It's something that has been created out of nothing.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, we have the statement that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. [00:26:04] That's the new state which God has created in us.

And the word that's used for workmanship in Ephesians chapter 2 is the same word in the Greek from which we derive our English word poem, which perhaps just reveals to us the craftsmanship, if you like, to what God has done. The new state that he has created in us is something beautiful, something wondrous to behold. And again, the new state that we enjoy was created by God and God alone.

I just want to say a few more words about these verses and particularly what we have in the statement that we are saved as a result of God's gift.

[00:27:06] Because it's important for us to remember that we didn't have any part in this at all. And when we reflect on verses 1, 2 and 3, that should be obvious to us. Being dead, having no inkling towards God, having nothing in us that would respond to God, how could we have any part in our salvation?

Everything had to come from God.

If there had been anything in us that had brought about our salvation, our salvation would not be by God's grace. We would have been saved by a work and by at least one thing that we had done. And

as a result of that, on the basis of scripture, we'd be entitled to boast about that. But that's not what we have presented here. [00:28:01] If there had been a single thing in us that had brought about our salvation, again, it would not have been by grace.

In Romans 11, verse 6, we have it stated there that if a single work were involved, this is my paraphrase of the verse, obviously, but if there were a single work involved, then grace would not be grace, but rather it would be a debt.

And following on from this, if we had a single thing to do with our salvation, Ephesians 2 couldn't describe us as God's workmanship. We'd be our own workmanship, at least in part.

Now, having discovered that we had no part in the new state that we've received, it's important to realise that we do have something to do going forward because verse 10 of our chapter tells us that we were created in Christ Jesus unto good works, [00:29:05] which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. So the injunction to us is to walk in good works. Now, the expression good works isn't defined in these verses, and I think that's probably because there's no limit to the good works that we can walk in for God.

Note that the verse says that God has prepared these good works. Perhaps to put that another way, they're part of his eternal counsel. And so if we are walking in good works, then we are fulfilling God's will and fulfilling part of his eternal counsel.

Having said all of that, it's important to emphasise, particularly in the teachings that continue in parts of Christendom today, [00:30:05] that works are not required to maintain our salvation. The present state that's described in our verses is ours forever. It is that we are saved.

But works are the appropriate response to all that God has done for us.

I just want to finish by reference to another verse in Titus chapter 3. But perhaps before reading that verse out, I just want to mention one other verse. In 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 15, we have the verse which I'm sure we all love. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Now, there's another faithful saying in the New Testament, and that's found in Titus chapter 3, verse 8.

[00:31:05] And it's perhaps a fitting note to finish on. Remembering what has been presented to us in these verses, what we were and what God has done to bring us out of that state and to give us this wonderful new state to enjoy even now.

Let's read the verse together, Titus chapter 3, verse 8. This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.