

“The Family of God” continues - April 10, 2020

Study in Ephesians

Ephesians 2

Dr. Jeff Stivason

April 10, 2020

Jeff: Good morning. It’s good to be with you, at least in a digital way. And I hope that these times are a benefit to you, and we’ll continue them as long as we need to.

I have a couple of housekeeping things to do before we get started. First of all, I need to do Sig’s job or Kirk’s job, or my job. I need to give you the announcements. And perhaps the most important announcement is that today is Bruce Bickel’s 77th birthday. So if you go to the website and scroll down below the prayer requests, you will find that you have the opportunity to send Bruce Bickel a birthday card, an e-birthday card. So I would encourage you to go there and send him a happy birthday notice. He’ll be delighted to receive that from you. And again, today is his 77th birthday. So let me encourage you to do that.

I also want to share something with you that I thought was a bit humorous. It was an email I received about a week ago. And it was from someone in the Brave Men group, and that someone will remain unnamed. But I’m sure that you will, as I did, know exactly who this is from.

It goes like this. “I must confess that I’m a candy man at this time of year.” I think you already know who we’re talking about. “I’ve never outgrown chocolate bunnies and eggs, and I’m indulging this week and a lot next week. I hope I’m not violating 1 Corinthians 13, Paul’s admonition that when he was a child he thought, spoke and acted like a child. But when he was an adult, he put away childish things. At the same time I believe there will be chocolate in glory of a magnitude that we have never experienced here.” And this was signed “Willy Wonka.” And I’m sure that you know exactly who Willy Wonka is.

Well, why don’t we get started today? And why don’t we get started asking the Lord’s blessing?

Father in heaven, we are thankful for our time together. And even if it’s just in a digital way, we pray that Your hand would be upon us as we study Your word together; bless us in it.

Father, we also ask that Your hand would be upon our nation and our world. We know that it is. And we know that Your everlasting arms are under our world—supporting it, upholding it, sustaining it by Your providence. And so we pray to You, asking that You will indeed give the world relief from this curse and plague. Father, we pray that You will indeed vanquish the COVID 19 virus. And we pray, Father, that You will allow our lives to return to some sense of normalcy, and yet a normalcy that puts You at the very center of life, a normalcy that has as its very root repentance for sin. And so, Father, we do take this opportunity to pray and ask for the forgiveness of our sins. Father, we know that we are sinful and corrupt; we are in fact depraved people. And we ask that You will help us to take the opportunity to search ourselves and confess those sins that have hidden in the corners of our lives uncontested for so long. So Lord, we pray that You will hear our repentance and see our sorrow. In fact, we pray that You would grant it to us. And as You

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grant it to us, that You will hear and respond. And we pray, Father, that You will help us as we understand what it means to be forgiven, and what it means to endeavor to new obedience.

Father, turn our attention and our hearts to Your word. Bless us now, we pray, as we open to the book of Ephesians, for we ask it in Jesus’ blessed name. Amen.

Well, what I want us to do today is to turn our attention to Ephesians chapter 2. Now I want us to look today at the entire chapter. But it may be the case that we will look at part of the chapter today and then part of the chapter next week. And so we’ll see how our time goes. But I want us to turn now to Ephesians chapter 2. And I want us to read the chapter in its entirety.

One of the things that I delight to do as a minister of the gospel is to remind people week by week that what I’m reading in their presence to them, and what I’m about to proclaim to them, is God’s word. In our day of uncertainty, whether you turn on the news stations or whatever, one of the things that you realize is that their spin abounds. Everyone is taking an opportunity to say what they want about the facts and to spin things the way they want to spin them, to politicize them in the way they want to politicize them.

I want you to understand something. This is the word that is inerrant. It is the word that is infallible. And all that means is this. Infallibility means that it is true. And we know that it’s true because it’s from God, and God is true. . . And we know that it’s inerrant because God does not wander from His truth; He tells it.

Now obviously there are some things recorded in the Bible. For instance, men lie. And those lies are recorded in the Bible. But even then God records those events faithfully. This is an inerrant word; it does not wander from the truth. And I would encourage you in these uncertain days to take your stand upon it like never before, because this is a sound word.

Well, let me read to you from Ephesians chapter 2. And again I’ll read the entirety of the chapter. But we may only cover a portion of my lesson today. So listen to God’s word.

“And you were once dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

“Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called ‘the circumcision,’ which is made in the flesh by hands.

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Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the wall of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

“And He came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” That is the word of the living God.

Well, let me help you with a couple of things that we’re going to be thinking about today. We’re going to be thinking about this question. *Where have you been?* And we’re also going to be thinking about this question: *where are you now?* So where have you been, and where are you now?

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves when we open up to this particular section of Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2, is a simple one. Why in the world does Paul start here? Why does he take off at this point with this subject?

I want you to think about it for a minute. Go back in your mind to Ephesians chapter 1. And there we were told that we are in Christ. We’re told about the electing love of God. We’re told about our adoption in Him. We’re told that we have *“every blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* We’re told that the mystery that had been long waiting to be revealed had been revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We were also told that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, and is the power that raises us from our spiritual death. We were told all of these things.

And now, all of a sudden, in Ephesians chapter 2 we get the bad news. Now that’s interesting when you think about it, because when you go to a doctor’s office one of the things that you don’t hear is that you don’t hear all the good news. What you see is that you see the doctor standing before you and asking you what the problem is, asking you about your symptoms, and then trying to diagnose those symptoms. And so you get the idea, at least in some sense, that something’s amiss. Something is backward as we come to Ephesians chapter 2.

And so we have to ask ourselves a simple question, especially when we look at any text, let alone the Biblical text. And that is well, what’s the connection between chapter 1 and chapter 2? Is there a natural connection that we can discern, that we can understand why it is that Paul begins on such a positive note and moves in such a negative way in Ephesians chapter 2?

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Well, there is a natural connection. There is a natural connection, a natural flow between chapter 1 and chapter 2. And in one sense we might call it this. It’s really an elaboration. So Paul planted the seeds in chapter 1. And we see those seeds grow in chapter 2.

For instance, let me give you what I mean. Look at verse 18 of chapter 1. And in verse 18 of chapter 1 this is what Paul says. He says, *“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.”*

And one of the things that we realize is, (and in fact, if we go on and read verse 19, it says this): *“and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”*

Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. He is telling us that our eyes were once darkened. And when you think about that you think to yourself, well, were our eyes closed? And what’s the situation that he’s describing? Were we in a darkened room and light flooded that room? What’s the situation?

Well, the situation is explained and is elaborated for us in chapter 2. It wasn’t just that we were in a darkened room. It wasn’t simply that our eyes were closed. It was that we were dead in our sins and transgressions. In chapter 2 verse 1 he says, “You were dead in your sins.”

Now that’s an interesting idea to think about. In fact, many people have thought about that in a variety of different ways. And I’ve even used that myself in ways to describe our spiritual condition before God.

For instance, I’ll never forget that I was teaching a youth group many years ago now. And I asked one of the boys to hop up on the table. And I said, “Lie still; don’t move.”

And to the other students I said, “Now we’re going to imagine that Mark is dead. We’re going to think about what a dead body does in response to stimuli.” So I took off my shoe and I held it up to Mark’s nose and I said, “Now Mark can’t smell if he’s dead.” He was sputtering and gasping a little bit. But I said, “If he were dead he wouldn’t be able to smell. And if I leaned down and screamed in his ear he wouldn’t be able to hear. And if I poked him with a pin he wouldn’t flinch because he’s dead.”

And we see that Paul is telling us that our darkened eyes were darkened because of death. And here’s the question that we have to ask ourselves. What does he mean when he describes us as being dead in our sins and transgressions? And the reason why we have to ask what that means is this. We are very much alive. Even the unbeliever that we see on the street who repudiates Christ and who hates God, they’re very much alive. They’re living, they’re breathing, they’re alive. So what do we mean?

Well, in other parts of Scripture the condition that Paul is explaining here is explained in other ways. For instance, in Romans 1:18 we find that God reveals Himself in what He has made. And yet men who are unbelievers hold it down and suppress it. In fact, the word has to do with something like a spring that’s held down. And so they deny what is revealed to them.

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Now sometimes that slips through their consciousness, and they have to admit it and do admit it. For instance, the atheist can't admit that there is no God. He has to add onto his admission that there is no God. But in fact he hates the God that he claims doesn't exist. And so every once in a while it slips through the cracks that they can't help but deny that there is a God that they hold down and suppress. And so they're very much alive.

So the question is, when we come back to Ephesians chapter 2, the question is, well, what aspect of death is Paul wanting to highlight as he describes our spiritual condition? And I think that the aspect of death that he wants to describe for us is the aspect of the dissolution of a relationship.

I want you to think about Romans chapter 7, verses 1-3.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 7:1-3, ESV. *“Or do you not know, brothers, (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.”*

Jeff: There we realize that Paul uses marriage as an example. And he says that a man and a woman are married until they are parted by death. And once they are parted by death there is a break in the union. And so what we understand is that the death that's being described here in Ephesians is a break of relationship. It's a separation of relationship. In Adam we died to God.

And so you look at this and think to yourself that this is separation from God. And actually that's what Paul says it is. In Ephesians 4:18 he says that we were separated from God.

Transcriber's Note: Ephesians 4:18, NKJV. *“Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”*

Jeff: In fact, in our text we read the very same thing, that the Gentiles were separated from God at one time. And so how do we understand this? How do we come to grips with this?

Well, we might understand it in this way. This is like a bad divorce. We know Him but we hate Him. And that's the very thing that Paul talks about in Romans 1:18.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 1:18, ESV. *“For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”*

Jeff: And here we are separated from Him Why? Because there has been a putting asunder the covenantal relationship with Him in Adam. And it's because of that that we're separated from Him, like in death. And so it's like a bad divorce. We know Him but we hate Him. And all life has gone wrong as a result of that separation.

And oftentimes what happens if we stay with that idea of divorce and that idea of a nasty sort of split, then we realize that oftentimes what happens is that one party or both have some really bad influences in their lives. And that's what we find here. In fact, there are three really bad influences that have crept into our communal life as a result of having been separated from God.

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For instance, in Ephesians 2:1 we find that there is the world itself. In fact, we followed *“the course of this world.”* Now the course or age of this world is sometimes translated “to breathe.” At least in ancient Greek texts it’s translated “to breathe.” The words have a morphology and the etymology of the word changes over time. One knows that as one studies words, and so this has changed over the course of time. And so it has come to mean the idea of “course” or “age.” But in the distant past it was “to breathe.”

But the idea would have been the same. You can see how the word morphs. In other words, to breathe and to follow the course of this world have a similarity between them. In other words, if I follow the course of this world I’m breathing its air. I’m taking what is around me into myself and it’s becoming part of me, such that I follow its course; I’m patterned after it. So you can see the point of similarity.

And so the idea then is this. The idea is that sinful behavior would have been very natural as I followed the course and the pattern of this world as I breathed in its air.

And the other influence that we find in the text is *“the prince of the power of the air”* himself; that’s the devil. The prince of the power of the air was a terrible influence in our lives. Once he was our friend and now he is our enemy. In other words, once we listened to his suggestions. We delighted in his ways of doing things. We wanted to follow after them. But now he’s our enemy, having our eyes enlightened, coming alive in God. Now he’s our enemy. Ephesians 6:12 tells us that now he is our enemy. He now *“shoots flaming darts”* at us that we must ward off with *“the shield of faith.”*

In fact, all you have to do is think of that great book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. I’m so thankful that long ago, many years ago now, John put that up on the website. I don’t know if that’s still there. But if it’s not Sig ought to put it up again. But the idea is that as Christian leaves the City of Destruction he goes to the house called Beautiful. He’s fitted with his armor. And remember that he goes down into the valley. And as he makes his way down into the Valley of the Shadow, he encounters Abaddon. And he encounters the devil, the evil one. And he does battle with him there.

And Abaddon tells him. He says, “Go back to my territory.”

And remember what Christian says. Christian says, “I’ve left your territory; I’m no longer there. I am now a citizen of the kingdom of the Lord of life.” And so they have this great and terrible battle.

The interesting thing about that battle is this. If you notice, it’s a terrible and a bloody battle. But Bunyan only gives a very small portion of the battle to the actual combat. The majority of that battle is in words. It’s Abaddon saying one thing and Christian saying another; it’s a battle of words.

One of the things that we realize is that words matter. And we see that it’s a battle not of flesh and blood, but it’s a battle of the Spirit. And the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, so it’s a battle of words.

You see this in a very interesting way in Mark’s Gospel, in Mark chapter 5. I’ll try to remember some of the details of this story. But this was the story of Jesus going to the Gadarenes. And the Gadarene demoniac was on the shore. He spotted Jesus coming. And interestingly he runs down onto the beach, and there’s this great clash.

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Now we would expect the Gadarene demoniac to pick Jesus up, to break Him, to try to do bodily harm to Him. But what we realize when we open up to that story is that this is really a battle of words. The Gadarene demoniac is saying to Jesus, *“I adjure You, Son of the Most High God, not to send me into the abyss.”* Remember that?

In fact, in Mark’s Gospel this is what it says. *“And crying out with a loud voice he said, ‘What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure You by God, do not torment me.’”*

Now that’s an interesting word. The words *“I adjure you”* mean, “I place You under oath.” In other words, what is the Gadarene demoniac trying to do? This is the man whose chains couldn’t hold him. This is a man who understands that if he’s going to defeat the Son of God in battle he needs to defeat him with words. And so he tries to bind the Son of God with an oath. “I adjure You, I bind You by oath not to torment me.”

And the fact of the matter is that Jesus wins the battle of words. And so when we find the prince of the power of the air, one of the things that we have to realize is that it’s a battle of words. He’s whispering in our ear. And it’s the shield of faith that will extinguish his darts that he slings at us. And so he who was once our friend, the prince that we once followed, is now of course our enemy.

There’s an interesting story that I want to take time to tell you. And you might laugh at it, but I’ve got a point in telling it.

One year I had an intern serving with me. And he went off to seminary after his college days. And he called me up. He was in the New England states; he was in Massachusetts. He called me up and he said, “Jeff, would you come and perform my wedding ceremony. And if you come you can stay in my apartment while I’m away on my honeymoon.”

So we packed up and went and had a delightful time at the wedding, and then stayed the week. One of the things that he did was that he left me one of the traveling tour classes at the seminary on the Puritans. I didn’t have my daughter at the time. So my wife and son and I, we traveled all over the place to these Puritan sites in New England.

One of the places that we visited was Ipswich. If you drive into Ipswich, one of the things that you see on the right hand up on the hill, on the left hand side if you’re going the opposite direction, but it was on the right hand side in this case. There was on the hill a church. And I think it was a Congregational church. And the interesting thing is that if you drove up on the one side of that church there was “the devil’s footprint.”

Now the church didn’t advertise this or anything. This was in the class syllabus. You noticed that there was a green spray-painted circle around what looked like a gnarling footprint.

Now what’s the story behind that? Well, the story behind that comes out of the first Great Awakening. Supposedly George Whitefield, that famous minister of the gospel, that famous evangelist, -- If you ever want to know anything about George Whitefield I would commend to you the two-volume set written by Arnold Dallimore. Arnold Dallimore has written two volumes on George Whitefield, and it’s just a delightful read. So if you want to read something wonderful over this time of being quarantined, you can get that from the Banner of Truth.

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Anyway, while George Whitefield was in Ipswich he was preaching at the church. And the story goes that he was preaching so powerfully and so fervently that the devil who was on the steeple of the church building threw himself down and left his footprint. Now we laugh at that. And we think to ourselves that that’s a funny story. We don’t believe it, of course. Satan is not in bodily form; he’s not incarnate. And of course he wouldn’t leave a footprint. And so there’s a little bit of humor in that story.

And yet there’s not. And the reason why there is not is this. The people who were in that first Great Awakening, the people who told that story and repeated its telling, believed that the devil was real. They believed that he was *“prowling about like a roaring lion,”* waiting to devour someone.

And I want you to understand something. That’s an understanding of the prince of the power of the air that we need to reclaim, that he is real. And like Peter says, he is *“a roaring lion, prowling about, seeking someone to devour.”* We need to understand that.

Now the question is, how does he do that? Well, we have to remember how he goes about doing this. And how he goes about doing this is consistent with what we’ve been talking about. Words matter. What we think and say matters.

I want you to think along with me in 1 Peter chapter 5. And in 1 Peter chapter 5 we find this very interesting statement. It’s in verses 6 and 7. *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.”*

Now again, think about that statement. Think about that. It raises a number of questions for us. *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all Your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.”*

Now the question has to be this. How do all of those pieces go together? How does it go together that we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt us at the proper time? Where does casting all your anxieties fit in? How do we understand those verses?

Well, we need to understand that that this is an *aorist participle*. This idea of casting is an aorist participle. One of the things that you learn is that if you go to an introductory grammar, you learn that introductory grammars really try and help you to understand verbs and their tenses and the way in which they express themselves by their voice, and that sort of thing. And one of the things that we learn from an introductory grammar about the aorist participle is this. They instruct us to insert the word *after* in order to get the sense of time from the verb.

Now let me insert the word *“after”* at the appropriate place, and it will give us a sense of time. Let me read it for you. *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you, after casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”*

Now I want you to understand the sense of that. The sense of that is that we must relinquish control. We must cast all of our anxieties upon Him. We must relinquish control and then accept humbling.

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Do you get it? *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God”*, that He may exalt you at the proper time, after casting all your anxieties on Him. In other words, we must relinquish control, giving up our anxieties, accept humbling, and then God will exalt us at the proper time.

Now I want you to understand something. I want you to understand how that verse continues on. That verse continues on by saying that we are to be *“sober-minded, watchful. For your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

Now I want you to think about that for a minute. When we do not cast our anxieties upon Him and accept humbling, then we open ourselves up to the roaring lion who prowls about, seeking someone to devour. In other words, if we’re clinging to our anxieties, if we are holding fast to them, what are we doing? What are we actually doing? We are actually thinking that we are in control.

You see, when we are anxious about something, it means that we do not trust the providence of God. And so we are holding on. We are anxious about it because we believe that we are in control, or at least ought to be. But this text says that when we let these things go and let God be God, then we accept humbling. And then we can be safe and sober-minded against the prowling lion of the devil.

I want you to think back to a story that we’re told that this mirrors. Think back to the story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve did not relinquish their anxiety, but believed themselves to be God, and did not accept humbling. And the prowling lion of the devil sought them out and did indeed devour them. Pride-filled targets are the little morsels that the evil one enjoys devouring.

And I want you to understand the last thing. There was the influence of the world and the evil one, and then there’s the influence of the flesh, the passions. I want you to understand something. When we are influenced by the flesh, one of the things that we realize is that we’re influenced by its sinful tendencies, and we choose the things that we desire out of our flesh, and therefore we are sons of disobedience. We were children of wrath. And that’s what we were.

And the reason why Paul explains that to us is because he wants us to understand that this is what we once were. In other words, your eyes have been enlightened. And now you are something different. But this is what you once were. This was the darkness in which you once lived.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves is this; it’s a simple one. *Where are we now?* And with that we’ll pick up the next time. The Lord bless you until we see one another again.