Study in Ephesians

Ephesians 2 Dr. Jeff Stivason April 17, 2020

Jeff: Good morning, Brave Men. And I wish I could say that it's good to be together with you, because right now I'm in a room that's empty. And so I wish I were with you. And hopefully in the Lord's providence we'll be together again soon. In the meantime let's continue to pray for one another. Sig has updated the website and the prayer requests that are found there. So remember to scroll through that and pray for your brothers. And pray that we'll be together again soon. Pray that the Lord will grant us protection all along the way.

Well, let's do just that. Let's pray together as we start. Father in heaven, we are thankful and we praise You. We know that we are kept by Your providential hand, by the security of Your grace found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, as we bow before You we are mindful that we belong to You and that we are in the palm of Your hand, and no one can snatch us from Your hand. Lord, You are great and worthy to be praised. So bless us today and strengthen us by Your grace as we bow before you and Your word, for we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Well, let's start with the reading of God's word. And the last time we were together we looked at just the first three verses of Ephesians chapter 2. And today I want us to finish looking at chapter 2 together. So let me read God's word to you. This is the word of the living God; give your ear to it.

"And you were 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 the 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 Jesus, 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 your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may 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. 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 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 law 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 through 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 upon 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 are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Holy Spirit."

Well, you remember the outline from the last time we were together. And that outline went something like this. We talked about *where have you been?* And then we were supposed to move to *where are you now?* And then *the blessing of being here*, and then *here with you*. And we're going to cover all of those things. But before we do, let me just wrap up something that we talked about the last time we were together.

I want us to think about point #1 in terms of a recap. And I want us to think about the idea then of *where have you been?*

Well, Paul says that you were "dead in your sins and transgressions." So that's where you were. When you were outside of Christ you were dead.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves is what does that mean? What does it mean that when we were outside of Christ that we were dead? I mean, think about it. If you were to look outside, you would see a great number of people who are outside of Christ, who do not profess to have faith in Him. And they're very much alive. They're walking around. They're living, they're breathing. They're buying groceries, they're driving their cars, and so on. So what does Paul mean when he says, "You were dead in your sins and transgressions?"

Well, he means that we need to focus on that particular aspect of death. And what is that aspect? Well, that aspect of death that he has in mind is separation. In other words, when someone dies we are separated from them. They're in a different realm altogether. We no longer see them. Yes, at the funeral we can see the body. But they're in such a different realm that they cannot see us.

Once a friend of mine who was going to college worked for a funeral director. He used to deliver flowers to a particular funeral home. And he said that one day he took the flowers into the back of the funeral home. He sat them down. He said that he turned around and he said that there was a body on the table being prepared for a funeral. And he said that it startled him, and he jumped. But he said that the body didn't jump at all. He said that he didn't startle that body, not one iota.

Now why not? Well because that body, or that person who was in that body, well, they're in a different realm altogether. They're separated from their bodies, and so they're separated from others in this world. That's the idea. There's a sense in which we were separated from God.

And you see that in the book of Ephesians. In chapter 2, for instance, it talks about when we were "separated from Christ," outside of the commonwealth of God. But not only that. In chapter 4 Paul is going to revisit that same idea. And there he's going to talk about the time when we were separated from Christ, outside of Christ.

And so when you think about death, think about it as a separation, a separation wherein we are dead to one another, and yet a separation wherein we are very much alive.

And if I can use this illustration,--and I used it the last time we were together,--if I can use this illustration, it's like a bad divorce. We in Adam left God, deserted Him. And we know Him but we hate Him. It's a terrible thing. But that's exactly what Romans 1:18 says. It says that the natural man, the man dead in his sins and transgressions, knows God but "suppresses that knowledge in unrighteousness." Why? Well, because we hate Him. We have no affection for Him, absolutely no love for God.

That was our condition. And when it was our condition there were three influences in our lives that exacerbated things, made them even worse. The first one was the world itself—not the good things in the world, but the things in the world that are contrary to God, the patterns of this present world, the way this world always tries to squeeze God out of the picture. In that sense we imbibed the world, followed in its patterns, delighted in its ways, or as Paul says, "followed in its course."

But not only that. Paul says that we were hand in hand with "the prince of the power of the air." He was our master. He was our friend, if you can call him that. The point is that we bowed our knees to another master, in fact a master who is no master at all, a master who is and was wicked, the Satan of the Old Testament, and certainly Satan, the deceiver of the New. That's who we followed. That's the one to whom we bowed the knee.

But not only that. We also had a problem within ourselves. Our flesh constantly led us astray, imbibed with every want and desire outside of Christ. It sought every pleasure apart from Him. And so when we ask the question "where have you been?", the answer has to be "in a very bad place." We were separated from God, isolated from Him.

And now that leads to the second point that I want us to think about today. And it's where are you now?

Where are you now? Well, a word about why we had to think about where have we been, so that we can now think about where are we now. In the 1100s there was a book written by a man named Anselm. And Anselm wrote a book called *Cur Deus Homo*. The translation is *Why the God-Man?* And it was a book about the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in that book he talks about God as the offended party, how man was the offender, and how Christ had to bring reconciliation, how He had to take upon Himself the great debt that was ours in order to bring reconciliation.

It's in that book that there's a character; it's a dialogue. Anselm is discussing this with another person. It's in that book that there's a wonderful statement that's made, and it's to the dialogue partner. His name is Boso. And he is quite a bozo. If you read the book you can tell that he blunders around a bit.

But Anselm says this to him as he makes a statement about sin. He says this. He says, "You have not yet considered the greatness of the weight of your sin." And why do we need to understand the greatness of the weight of our sin? Well, it's only when we understand where we've been, and the greatness of our sin, where we once were, it's only then that we'll understand the great rescue of God in our lives, and what it took. It's only then that we'll understand the greatness of the love that He had for us in Christ Jesus.

Now I want you to think about Romans chapter 5 for just a minute. In Romans chapter 5 we're told that God "loved us when we were yet sinners." It was when we were yet sinners that he sent the only-begotten Son, His only-begotten Son into the world in order to shoulder the curse for us. It was when we were sinners that He sent His Son into the world to do that for us.

Now I want you to think about that. Sometimes somebody will die for a friend. But who will die for an enemy? And we were God's enemies. And He sent His only Beloved into the world to die for us when we were yet His enemies. You see, it's only when we realize our great debt. It's only then that we'll realize the treasure of grace and mercy expressed to us in Christ. And so God came to us in the deadness of our sin. He came to us when we were separated from Him, when we knew Him but hated Him. And He gave to us His Son that we might have life.

Now I want you to think about why He came and what He did. It's described for us in three ways in this passage. "He made us alive." "He raised us up." And "He seated us with Him in the heavenly places."

Now I want you to understand something about these things. There's a sense of "the already but not yet" to them all. "He raised us up. He made us alive. He seated us." There's a sense in which even now we're seated with Him in the heavenly places. There's a sense now that we're with Christ, because we're united to Him. We're already these things.

And yet there's a consummation that will take place. And when that consummation happens, these things will be brought into fullness for us. And so that's here.

But I want you to catch something. I want you to notice something about what God did. Notice; it's in verse 4. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses." In other words, even when we were His enemies, even when we were standing outside of the commonwealth of Israel, outside of Christ. Even then, when we despised him, because He is rich in mercy it was then that He made us alive. The point is that He is the One who brought a spiritual resurrection to us. He is the One who brought us from outside to the inside. He is the One who drew us close to Himself. He came to us in the deadness of our sins, and this is what He did for us. And I want you to understand that it's in Christ that we are safe and secure.

I realize that we don't always understand these things to the fullest extent, to the fullest ability, because we're still looking through a glass darkly. In fact, I want you to think about an illustration that might help.

I'll never forget my wife's grandmother who had passed away, and I was in their home after the funeral. And I was milling about, and I came to a curio cabinet that needed some

elbow grease and some tender loving care. And I was looking into the curio because behind the glass that was smudged and dirty it looked to me as if there were some really pretty things behind the glass. But I couldn't make them out, and certainly they didn't look nearly as good behind the glass.

Someone saw me looking into the curio. He walked over and took the key from the cabinet and opened the door. And when he opened the door I saw some of the most beautiful pieces of crystal.

And that's the way of it, isn't it? What we see now, well, we know that it's beautiful. And we know that it's wonderful. But we see it behind the smudged glass. And we don't see its brilliance and its beauty. And at the consummation of all things, when that curio is opened to us, well it's then that we'll see the brilliance of what is ours in Jesus Christ.

So where are you now? Well, where you are now is in Christ. You were once outside of Him, and now you're in Him. And so where you are now is in Christ.

Well, that leads us to think about the third point, which is *the blessing of being here*, or *the blessing of being in Christ*. Now let me ask a vital question. How does what belongs to Christ become mine? In other words, if I possess Christ and all of the benefits that flow from Him, the question is how do I possess those benefits? And the answer is faith alone. It's by faith alone that I possess Christ and all of the benefits that are in Him.

Now the question is, what is faith? And I've talked with you at length about this before. But it's always a good topic to talk about over and over and over again, because when we lose sight of the basics, well, we're going to lose sight of the whole. And I don't ever want us to lose sight of the whole. In fact, maybe you'll remember me telling you this. I think this is an excellent reminder.

Every year before Arnold Palmer would go on the golf tour he would go to his old instructor and say, "Mr. So-and So," (I can't remember his name), "would you teach me to pay golf?" And so his instructor would take him through all of the basics. Palmer believed that if he reviewed the basics and refreshed on the basics then his game would be solid. And it would keep him from getting hung up in all the tips.

For instance, he said that oftentimes when he would go on the golf tour, one of the things that would happen is that other pros would tell you, "Well, I noticed that you're doing this," and "Maybe you ought to try this." And he said that if you took all the tips that were given to you throughout the season, and you added those to your golf game, he said that by the time you got to the end of the season you would be an absolute mess. So he said it was crucial for him to always go back to the basics, and every year at the beginning of golf season to be reminded of those basics and be reminded of what a solid game of golf looked like.

And so it is with theology. It's always good to go back to the basics, to be reminded of what a solid Christian life looks like. And an understanding of faith is one of those solid understandings, one of those foundational things.

So what is faith? Well, as I've said to you before, faith is cat written with a k. The k is knowledge, or as you might find in some of the texts written by the Reformers, *notitia*, knowledge. Now this is certainly intimacy with God. When the Reformers talk about

knowledge, they obviously mean a knowledge of who God is and what He did for us in Christ.

There are some basic points that one needs to understand in order to exercise saving faith. For instance, there is one God and His Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. And that Son was given as an atoning sacrifice for sins—those basic building blocks of the gospel.

But the second aspect of faith is assent, *assensus*. We must agree with the things that we know.

Now let me just stop here a second, and let me just draw a line right here, because James tells us in James chapter 2 that the demons know things about God, true things. And if you can get them to stop lying long enough, they'll tell you some of those true things. And they'll even admit that they agree with those things about God; how can they not? But this then does not constitute saving faith.

So what is saving faith? Well, what's the t? Well, the t is trust, or again, if you think of the Latin, it's *fiducia*, trust.

Now this has to do with our affections. This has to do with our love for God. For instance, someone can know with their minds something about God and agree with what they know. But they hate God.

I want you to think of it like this. I've talked to you about this before. The person is composed of what's called a dispositional complex. And a few of those things, when we think about a dispositional complex, are what? The mind, the will, and what? The heart. We oftentimes think of the heart as the emotions.

Now when we think about this particular scheme of things, one of the things that we realize is that knowledge has to do with the mind. And assent has to do with the will. And so someone can know things and even agree with those things, and yet in the case of God actually hate what it is that they know. And so what saving faith does is that it inflames the affections for God so that now not only do we know and agree with what we know, but we love what we know. We love what we will to embrace. And this becomes absolutely crucial in thinking about saving faith.

So when we think about saving faith we know something, we agree with what we know, and we love it. That's saving faith.

Now the point of this is this. When we think about Ephesians, and think about that aspect of death that is separation, we know Him but we hate Him. Now all of a sudden we realize that He came to us and reconciled us to Himself. He by His great mercy and great love went to us and brought about a spiritual resurrection. He inflamed the affections of our hearts for Him. So now we know Him, we want Him, we will to have Him and love Him. And that's what we think of when we think about how it is that the things that are Christ's now belong to us. It's by saving faith. And it's a faith that we find here in the text.

Now let me just say something else about this faith, because it's absolutely vital. Notice what it says in verse 8. It says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Now I want you to just pause there and think about this. It's Christ who saves us through faith.

Now that's really important. Pastorally it's super important, because oftentimes people will say to us, "Boy, I wish I had your faith." Perhaps going through this whole crisis somebody has said to you, "I marvel at you; you're handling this so well. I wish I had your faith."

And what you want to say to that person is, "No, you don't want my faith, because my faith is sometimes weak and small, and sometimes it's strong. No, you don't want my faith; you want my Christ, because He saves me through faith." It's Christ who saves through faith, and that alone.

So we need to remember that faith is a gift from God, and it is Christ who saves through it. But let's think about this even further. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God."

Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. What is the antecedent of *this?* In other words, what does *this* refer to? Does *this* refer to the faith, saying, "This faith is not of your own doing, but a gift of God," or does it refer to the whole process? "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of your own doing. It is the gift of God." In other words, is it both the grace of God and the faith that we exercise, is all of that not of our own doing, but a gift of God?

Well, the answer is yes. I think that in one sense it really doesn't matter; it's all the gift of God. Grace is the gift of God. Faith is the gift of God. It's all the gift of God.

And why is it the gift of God? What makes the point? Well, it's because our salvation is not the result of works. Our faith is a gift from God. And the faith through which we're saved, well, that's not of our own doing; it's a grace from God, lest anyone of us should boast. "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." It's all of grace.

You know, I want you to think about this just for a minute. You know, when you come home and your little girl is all a mess, she's in her apron and she's got the spatula in her hand. And she says,

"Daddy, Daddy, look what I did! I made cupcakes." And your wife is standing there, and she's holding the cupcakes. And she's a mess because she's been in the kitchen with your two-year-old all day.

And the look on her face says it all. The look on her face says that the only thing she, the little girl, helped to do was to make the mess that you see in this kitchen. "I'm the one who made these cupcakes." And we think that's really cute. And it is; it's really cute.

But it's only cute with a two-year-old. It's not cute with an adult who says to God, "But I did something for this. I did something for my own salvation." That's not cute, nor is it inviting, nor is it appealing at all, because God is the One who saved us and saved us by grace, a grace that is gifted to us, a faith that is gifted to us, and so on.

Now being here means being where you are. It means being all in. If we're in Christ, then we're all in. And the way that's represented to us is that we'll have a different walk. In fact, in verse 10 we'll walk in the good works that were prepared beforehand for us to do. So our lives will be distinctively different because we are now in Christ, because we are now raised from our spiritual deadness because of the great gift which He imparted. And so there's a different walk. Being here means being all in.

Now the start of verse 11, if we really get practical about it, is the elephant in the room. It's not just the elephant in the room for the Ephesians. It's really the elephant in the room for all of the New Testament. In the book of Acts, chapter 15, this is the elephant in the room and in Romans the last chapter as well. It's really all of the book of Romans, especially the first three chapters and then at the end of the book—chapters 14, 15 and 16. This is the elephant in the room.

And what's the elephant in the room? Well, it's the tension between the Jews and the Gentiles. You need to remember that there was a great deal of tension in the early church between these two groups. Obviously the Christians were saying to the Jews that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, was their Messiah, and that He had come in fulfillment of the promises. And the Jews were looking at the Gentiles and saying, "He is no such thing."

And in fact this created quite a bit of tension. So much so that Emperor Claudius actually expelled Jews and Christians from Rome at one point because the tensions were so great. That's why, for instance, that in Acts chapter 15 the church called together a council to decide on matters pertaining to justification. Why? Because Jews and Gentile Christians had questions about what constitutes the true and saving message of the gospel. And so there were Jewish and Gentile tensions.

Now I'm not going to go into this particular part of the book, except to say a couple of things. And then if we get back together at some point and you want to tackle this problem we can do that. And I'd be happy to do it.

Let me just say a few things, though. First of all, I want you to notice that the two groups, Jew and Gentile, are brought together in Jesus Christ. The two become one in Christ. The dividing wall of hostility is brought down. And really Christ becomes peace between Jew and Gentile. In fact it says that in verse 14. "He is our peace." He is the peace that is for both the Jew and the Gentile. In verse 15 He established our peace. And in verse 17 He preached peace.

And so where is here? Well, here is in Christ. And so here means that Jew and Gentile can be present together in Christ. And the message of the gospel is the same. And it has been the same ever since Abraham. It's a message of belief in gospel promises. Abraham is called in Galatians chapter 3 "a believer." And we are children of Abraham if we believe those promises which culminate in Christ. So the Jew/Gentile problem is resolved in Christ who is our peace.

Now let's move on to the next point. And that point is *here with you*. Now what does that mean? Well, let me invite you to think both individually and corporately.

When we think about being individuals within the church, that's who we are. We are individuals who come to the church, and yet we're part of the body. As an individual I'm either a hand or a foot or a leg or a limb of some sort. And so I'm an individual, but I'm part of that body.

And when you think about that body, we need to train ourselves how to think. Oftentimes we can become pretty solemn-faced about the church. Sometimes we can have our fill of it. And that's not the way we ought to be. We ought to remember that the church is in Christ. And it's growing more and more in His likeness.

There's a great story in the Old Testament that reminds us of how God looks at the church. It's that story where Balak goes and gets Balaam, that terrible prophet, and asks him to come and curse the people of Israel. Balaam goes with him.

And every time Balaam opens his mouth to curse the people of God something good comes out of his mouth. And he can't understand it and is frustrated by it. But on one occasion he describes the church. And this is the way he describes them. He says,

"How fair are your tents, O Jacob,

Your dwellings, O Israel,

Like valleys that stretch out,

Like gardens beside the river,

Like aloes planted by the LORD,

Like cedars beside the waters!"

Now what I want you to understand is that as Balaam was staring down into that valley on the people of Israel, the church under age, the last thing in the world that they were was a lush valley, at least to the sight of the eye. I mean, this was a disobedient people. This was a second generation. The first generation had been obedient and died in the wilderness. The second generation was not circumcised and probably raised by those parents who were bitter with having to wander in the desert for those forty years. And they weren't perfect, not by any stretch of the imagination. And yet here is how God sees them. He sees them as beautiful tents, as a valley that stretches forth. He sees them as this beautiful plant, planted by the Lord beside waters. It's a beautiful picture.

And we need to remember. That's how God sees His church, as a beautiful bride. And sometimes we see ourselves as a limping bride, a bride with makeup that's not on quite right, and we look a bit disheveled, and so we are. But we're becoming what we already are in Jesus Christ, which is a beautiful bride. And so don't be discouraged by the church and where the church happens to be now. Have God's perspective, that we're becoming what we are.

In fact, it's very much like an individual perspective on sanctification. In Christ I am as saved as I will ever be. I possess the benefits and the blessings of being in union with Christ right now. And yet I'm growing up into those blessings. The same is true for the church.

Now it says that the church is built on Christ. But it gives us an image that I want you to notice. The image is that of a house. It's in Ephesians 2, verses 20-22. And one of the things that I want you to notice is that all of these words appear—"aliens," "household," "built on," "building," and "together." All of those words are in those verses— Ephesians 2:20-22.

And all of those words come from one word group. And that word group is a word group called the *oikos* word group. And the *oikos* word group is the word group from which *house* comes.

And so whether it be aliens who are now part of this household, built together, building together, all of these words have *oikos* in them. And what Paul is telling us is that God has built for Himself a great house.

Now one of the things you need to remember is that in the Old Testament sometimes *house* and *temple* were interchangeable. And so it is here. We are the temple of the living God, being built up together, living stones situated one with another. That's what we are, this beautiful temple which is Christ's body.

Now you have to hold this in tension with what's happening in Ephesus. Remember what's there. The Artemas temple is there. The temple of Diana is there. And frankly it's one of the ancient wonders of the world.

And what Paul is doing is this. He's really building a comparison, isn't he? He's saying, "Now I want you to think about the Artemas temple. And yes, it's beautiful, spectacular. But I want you to know what God is doing with you in Christ Jesus. He's building you up into a beautiful house, a temple for Himself, made of living stones. And it's spectacular."

And you know, if you can hold that imagery in your head, you begin to realize that this is just an absolutely wonderful thing that Paul is talking about. You are in Christ so much more than the Artemas temple.

Now I want you to see something. I think it's an interesting thing. And it takes us back to this whole idea of union with Christ.

If you were to go to John chapter 14, this is the night on which Jesus was betrayed. And in John chapter 14 we find a very familiar verse. For instance, in verse,—well, I'll read verse 1. "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." Now listen to this. "In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you? I go to prepare a place for you."

Now the idea is this. The word for "rooms" is being used there. Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you." "I go and prepare a place for you in My Father's house where there are many rooms."

Now the interesting thing is this. You get this idea that spacially Jesus is going to prepare a place for us. But in verse 23, in the same chapter, this is what He says. "Jesus answered, 'If anyone loves Me, He will keep My word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

Now the word is translated "home," but it's room. It's that idea of room. It's the same word that was back in verse 2.

Now I want you to think about this. It is true that Jesus ascends to be with the Father and prepares a place for us in heaven. But it's equally true that the Father and Son come to us and prepare a place in us by virtue of the Holy Spirit having taken up residence in us. There's a reciprocity here that we shouldn't miss. It's the idea that we have a room with the Father, and that the Father and the Son have a room in us, and that by virtue of the Holy Spirit. We are in union with Christ, and we are in union with Him together.

Where is it that we're safe and secure? Where is it that nothing can touch us? It's in Christ. We are held in the palm of His hand. Neither height nor depth nor any danger can remove us from His hand. We are safe and secure. The very hairs of our head are numbered. Not a sparrow drops to the ground apart from the will of the Father. And how much more do we mean to the Father than a simple sparrow!

The point is that we're safe and secure in our union with Jesus Christ. Where were you? Well, you were outside of Christ. Where are you now? Well, I pray that it is in union with Jesus Christ, the safest of all places.

Men, the Lord bless you until the next time we meet again.