

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Ephesians 2:1-10

You may recall that our precious sermon/study series was *“Summer in the Psalms: Exploring the WITH GOD Life.”* This week’s passage in Ephesians can be summed up as a contrast between the WITHOUT God life vs. the WITH God life. (Paul’s term throughout Ephesians, and elsewhere, to express life WITH God is “in Christ”.)

This passage outlines very easily and nicely:

- I. Life without God (2:1-3)
- II. Life with God (2:4-7)
- III. The “How” and “Why” of Salvation (2:8-10)

Let’s look at each of these sections a little more closely.

First, in one word, life without God is death. Why? Again, in a word, sin. (Though Paul adds “transgressions”, he was not trying to create a different category, rather just to create a compounding effect.)

But “sin” needs to be understood as more than just wrong personal behavior (though it includes that as well). More than just “wrong-doing”, it’s actually a state or condition. Notice how Paul elaborates it: its following the pattern of *“the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”* (verse 2). Paul paints the picture that sin is more than just personal, it’s systemic and structural. Additionally, this WITHOUT GOD life is still WITH someone...the ruler/prince of the kingdom of air, the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient. The WITHOUT GOD life is not a neutral life. It’s putting in our lot with a different ruler and a different kingdom. In verse 3 Paul goes on to say, in essence, we were all citizens of that kingdom and that ruler before being delivered into Christ and His Kingdom. While sin is more than personal wrong-doing, it is still that as well. Paul describes it as *“gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature (flesh), following its desires and thoughts.”* (verse 3). Our “self”, our “identity”, our “life” prior to Christ is dead, and is conditioned—both from the inside and from the outside—toward selfishness and enmity with God. As such, we are *“by nature children of wrath”* (“children” is a better translation than “objects”). One way—though certainly not the only way—to understand God’s wrath is Him removing His Presence. (While I’m not sure I’m comfortable with limiting an understanding of “wrath” to only that, nevertheless I think it helps us understand it somewhat.) It is certainly accurate to say that life without God is death. For Him to remove His Presence is to remove His goodness and grace and to simply allow the consequences to fall where they may...then things get really bad, really quickly. At the same time, there is no reason to think that God’s love and God’s wrath can’t exist together. As was mentioned in the sermon, if wrath were not possible, we’d really have to question if love is actually present.

**Q. How would you define “sin”? How has your understanding of sin changed/evolved over the years?**

**Q. How would you describe the devil or Satan? How does that compare with Paul's description in verse 2?**

**Q. How do you understand God's wrath? How do you reconcile God's wrath with God's love?**

Second, in a word, life WITH God is to be ALIVE. Why? Because God's love for us, because He is rich in mercy, and exceedingly (incomparably) rich in grace...all of which is expressed in kindness toward us. A proper understanding of grace and mercy demonstrates how completely undeserved the opportunity for such a life is. God had every reason to right us off. So if any of this thing we call salvation was based on us, we'd be doomed. But, thankfully (and that is hardly a strong enough word), salvation is based on God—and He is love, He is life, He is overflowing in grace and mercy.

Now in this passage we see a very important and theologically deep truth about what it means to be "in Christ". It means that what is true of Jesus becomes true of us. God raised Jesus up from the dead. Verse 6 states that we were raised up with Christ. Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and this verse says that we, too, are seated with Him in the heavenly realms. Actually, if you're familiar with the teachings of Jesus, you'll recall that Jesus said of Himself, "*I am the light of the world.*" (John 9:5). But He also said about His followers, "*You are the light of the world.*" (Matthew 5:14). So, to be a Christian, to be "in Christ", means that what is true of Jesus is true of us...though not because of anything we've done, but because of what He has done. He is righteous and blameless...so are we. Now you might stop and say, "Uh, well, actually, I'm not that good." True, you're not, and neither am I. But Jesus is...and we are righteous and blameless because He is.

**Q. What do you think about the idea that what is true of Jesus is true of us?**

In this contrast between life WITHOUT God in 2:1-3 and life WITH God in 2:4-7 we need to recognize the existence of two overlapping kingdoms or ages existing at the same time. One is ruled by a benevolent God (as described in 2:4-7) the other is ruled by a tyrant (as described in 2:1-3). The question, then, is which one are we WITH? Which are we FOR? Who are we ALLIED to? The answer to that determines which one we have FAITH in. The sheer fact that as proven rebels we are given the opportunity to change our allegiance and come under the reign of Jesus is GRACE. God did not have to make such an offer/invitation. There was nothing that we did that would move Him to do that. This is really what Paul is trying to get across in verses 8-9.

Elsewhere Paul puts it like this: "*[God] has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" (Colossians 1:12b-14). God "qualified us"—we couldn't qualify ourselves. He rescued us—we couldn't rescue ourselves. He brought us (better translation—He transferred us)—we couldn't do it ourselves. The point is, we were completely helpless. Thus, when it comes to our salvation, we can't boast about it as if we did something noteworthy. But that is not to say that

we have an effortless response to make. As Dallas Willard said, “Grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort.” We can’t earn our salvation, but we must put forth some effort to receive it, to live into it, as a response to it. Or to say it another way: salvation is the WITH GOD life. Living with God takes some effort. But that effort isn’t in hopes of getting us to love us (there’s nothing we can do to get Him to love us more), or to get His favor (we already have it in Christ). But love must always be returned for it to be completed.

**Q. Which ruler are you allied to and cooperating with? How so?**

**Q. How are you returning love to God in response to what He has done for you?**

There are two important elements to grasp in verse 10. First, the word “workmanship” is the Greek word “poiema” from where we get the word poem. We are God’s poem. Think about that for a second. When someone writes a poem they are usually creatively expressing something deep about themselves (Please think beyond “Roses are red, violets are blue...”). That’s a beautiful word for Paul (inspired by the Holy Spirit) to use to describe us. We have worth and value, because God has imbued us with worth and value in Christ. Secondly, we were *“created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* We don’t need to search for the meaning/purpose of life. It’s been given to us by our Creator. We were created to do “good works”. That is far bigger than the occasional nice, charitable act of service or kindness. Rather, it means doing what were created to do in the first place, which is manage God’s creation. We are to rule over this planet (remember, what is true of Jesus is true of us...Jesus rules, so do we...with Him as the Chief Ruler, of course.) What Paul is saying is that through Jesus God is making everything right, He restoring everything to its original design and intent. New creation is breaking forth, full of life and goodness, right in the midst of the old order of things which is passing away (albeit, a bit slower than we’d like).

**Q. What is your job in the Kingdom of God? What are you doing to cooperate with God in restoring His creation to its original design and intent? (Perhaps a different way of asking this question: How are you an “agent of the Kingdom of God” in the life you live?)**