

# THIS IS US

Week One | August 13, 2017 | Mankind's Problem and God's Remedy

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone with God's Word reading through Ephesians 2:1-22. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in the guide this week. Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together as a group, that the Spirit would make effective your teaching and bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those that are present.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL REALITY

We were once dead and cut off from God in our depravity, but now we are restored and justified through Christ's work.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

True freedom means being free from worshipping ourselves, our own sin, and being free to worship Christ and serve others.

### MEDITATE

*"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13)*

## GETTING STARTED

+ *This introduction will help get your group thinking about the main focus of this week's lesson. Use this introductory material to lead into this week's lesson and begin conversation.*

- ♀: *Recall the Frankenstein story. What's different about the creator in that story versus God as our creator? What's different about the monster being brought to life and us being brought to life in Christ?*
- ♀: *Why do you think God wanted to save you?*
- ♀: *How do people usually answer the question "who are you?" How should we answer that question as believers?*
- ♀: *Why do you think it's important for us on a daily basis to be very clear on who we are in Christ? What areas in life are impacted by our identity?*

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a wild and panicked genius brings a monster to life. Victor, the creator, has two obsessive needs: to prove himself and to calm his mental anxiety. As the story goes, Victor assembles body parts together and brings them to life in the form of a living, breathing monster. The monster is given life, but it's a tragic one riddled with anger, fear, loneliness, regret, and even violence. The monster knows it should live better, but keeps resorting to violent behavior, unable to stop. In fact, at the end of the story, the monster ends up killing Victor's new wife out of revenge because he has not been loved or accepted by his creator. Victor may have achieved his goal of proving himself scientifically, but the monster's uncooperative heart and constant, uncontrollable outbursts bring the creator to great regret at ever having brought it to life. On one hand, God is certainly nothing like Victor. He does not bring things to life to prove himself or because he needs the cooperation of humans! God is fully satisfied in Himself. However, on the other hand, we can learn a lot from the monster, as he is a haunting illustration of who we once were, apart from Christ.

In Ephesians 2, Paul gives us a glimpse of our identity. He paints a horrific picture of who we were, showing just how monstrous humanity's condition is apart from God. We, like the monster, know somewhere inside that we should be better, but we are unable to care or change, and we end up resorting to the same old self-deprecating devices to get us through life. We, like the monster, even turn against our Creator when He doesn't do things our way. But, unlike the monster, we find ourselves rescued by a Creator who loves us. Paul shows us the way that God remedies the monster-of-a-problem we find ourselves in, and that remedy is in Christ alone. After we come to Christ, Paul then shows us a final picture of who we are now. The scales of the monster have fallen off, and now remade in Christ, we

are everything God intends for us to be.

Q: *How do you think God views you on a daily basis? As a monster or a child?*

Q: *In what posture do you usually start your time with God? Afraid? Confident? Warm? Cold? If you truly understood who you are in Christ, how would that impact the way you approach God?*

## II UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Ephesians 2 gives one of the clearest explanations of the entire gospel story, telling believers exactly who they once were, what God has done for them, that they are now in Christ, and what they can expect in the future. As we read, we will learn the horrible condition mankind is in without Christ (depravity and spiritual death), what God did about that condition through Jesus (justification and imputation), and the blessings received on the other side of trusting Christ for our salvation and our future (restoration and life). We will learn more about this great gospel story, which tells us who we truly are, in three movements:

1. **OUR PROBLEM: WHO WE WERE**
2. **GOD'S REMEDY: JESUS**
3. **THE RESULT: WHO WE ARE NOW**

### GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## OUR PROBLEM: WHO WE WERE

### II EPHESIANS 2:1-3 AND 11-12

Q: *Why might Paul have painted mankind as being spiritually dead as opposed to spiritually sick?*

**Q:** *What does “following the prince of the power of the air” mean? In what specific ways did you do this before knowing Christ?*

Paul begins Ephesians 2 by painting a very bleak picture of mankind. Given that he is speaking to current believers, Paul reminds them of who they once were before Christ, something like dead monsters who were enslaved to their own ways. He wants to make humanity’s problem crystal clear. First, he says that those without Christ are “dead” in sin, and he uses this word intentionally (v. 1). His point is this: humanity is not struggling with sin or sick in sin, able to somehow get better with enough effort. Instead, we are dead. Dead people can’t do anything, much less anything that pleases God! Left to ourselves, sin has suffocated us in a chokehold we can’t get out of, and spiritually, we have no hope of revival. In verses 2-3, Paul fills in the details of what being in a state of spiritual death means, floating along in the strong current of this world, uncontrollably living out every fleshly passion that comes to mind, and ultimately being guided by the hidden, lethal hand of Satan. We pursue everything God hates, and what’s worse, we can’t even see it or care about it. We’re like Frankenstein’s miserable creation who can’t seem to shake his own destructiveness. Paul also makes sure to add that “we all” approach life this way apart from God’s intervention; no one is exempt (v. 3)! According to Paul, we’re all dead people walking in total decay and rebellion, unable to awaken, unable to see what we’re doing, unable to stop sinning, and unable change our circumstances. We have no choice regarding our sin, and we likewise have no inclination toward God in the slightest. Even worse, we are enslaved to this condition. We turn against God even though He gave us the gift of physical life. This is a massive problem for humanity, a problem known by theologians as mankind’s depravity. In every category of our existence, humanity is enslaved to sin and Satan and separated from God. This is what being in a state of spiritual death means, and it’s the condition every human is born into (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12).

**Q:** *What does it mean to be under someone’s “wrath”? How does that feel?*

**Q:** *How does it feel to watch others enjoy blessings that you have no access to?*

Instead of moving to the good news quickly, Paul takes a little more time to help us get a good grasp on not just what depravity is, but what it costs us. Not only are we dead in our sin and enslaved to our own fleshly desires, but we will pay for all our lifeless, rebellious actions (v. 3). Paul explains this by saying humans are born as “children of wrath.” Because God cannot turn a blind eye to any sin, wrongdoing must eventually be paid for (Is. 59:2; Rom. 2:6, 6:23). God’s “wrath,” or holy fury, must be poured out over humanity’s sin, otherwise justice is not fully served in the end.

Every lost person (not a Christ follower) lives under this impending wrath, with no excuse and no way out.

Next, we see that our condition of depravity not only requires God's wrath, it also keeps us from God's blessings (v. 12). For one, Paul says that left to ourselves, we are not included as a member of the "commonwealth of Israel," or the people of God. And two, because we aren't counted as one of God's people, we are separated from the precious promises God gives to them. God's covenants are not offered to any person who reads them, but only offered to His people. A person dead in sin must watch God's people enjoy His presence, promises, and blessings, while sitting far off on the outside, awaiting wrath and punishment, with no access to these great blessings. Fallen, far off, and dead, this "depravity" is who we are and what we are destined to experience apart from God's help. Void of God, depravity means we are all a spiritual version of Frankenstein's monster. this condition.

Q: *Do you ever feel tempted to downplay who you were before Christ? Why do we sometimes fall into thinking we weren't all that bad?*

Q: *Why is it just for God to be wrathful about sin?*

Q: *Share about a time you first realized you were "dead in sin."*

Q: *How would you explain "depravity" to a non-Christian friend?*

## GOD'S REMEDY: CHRIST

### ■ ■ EPHESIANS 2:4-9

Q: *Instead of leaving us spiritually dead, why did God want to make us alive?*

Though our depravity is an impossible situation to get out of on our own, we worship the God of the impossible (Matt. 19:26)! In verses 4-9, Paul shows us exactly what God did when He saw who we were without Him. Even though we had dead, rebellious hearts that gave no thought to the Lord, continuing in sin regardless of the wrath that was coming for us, "even when we were dead in our trespasses" as Paul puts it, God responded with something totally unexpected: mercy, love, and grace (v. 4-5)! He knew that in our current condition, we were children of

wrath, but “because of the great love with which He loved us,” He wanted us to become children of mercy, light, and love instead (v.4). To do this, He mirrored what He did with Christ himself through the resurrection: though we were dead, God made us alive (v. 5)! This is something the New Testament calls regeneration, when God takes a spiritually dead heart and brings it to spiritual life. Jesus considers it a process so redefining for a believer that he refers to it as going through an entirely new birth, where a person is spiritually “born again” (John 3:3; 1 Pet 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5, 1 John 5:1). Like Frankenstein’s monster, we need an entirely new nature! This is what Christ gives us in regeneration.

But what to do with our accumulating record of sin and our hard hearts? Surely God could not simply overlook wrongdoing, or He wouldn’t be a just judge. No good judge winks at injustice or blatant crimes. So how did God “make us alive” again, with all our treason sitting so plainly for Him to see? The answer comes immediately after that phrase in verses 5-9. We weren’t just made alive on our own, we were made alive “with Christ—by grace you have been saved through faith...not as a result of works.” Our rescue and revival came not from our own hard work, but out of our attachment to a certain person and his work: Christ. According to these verses, Jesus is the only remedy for all our depravity!

**Q:** *If God simply overlooked our former sin, and didn’t give us a new nature and heart through regeneration, where would that leave us?*

God didn’t just “zap” us to spiritual life on a particularly compassionate day, sweeping our sin under the rug to be dealt with some other time. No, He dealt with the sin that separated us from Him by laying all the punishment for that sin on His Son. The depravity had to be paid for, and by the Father’s command and His own willingness (John 10:18, 20:21; 1 John 4:14), Jesus paid the costly price for our rebellion toward God. Now that the deadly depravity that stood between us and God has been paid for through Jesus, we can be made spiritually alive! And more than Jesus paying for our sinful record of rebellion through his bloodshed (v. 13), he also does something more: he gives us his perfect record (2 Cor. 5:21)! Now when God looks at our record, He not only sees a “clean slate,” He sees one filled up with perfect obedience based solely on Christ’s perfect obedience! This process is known by theologians as imputation, where Jesus’s perfect record, that is, His righteousness is “imputed” to us, or credited to our account. When we repent, and believe that Jesus did all this to save us and make us alive to God, all his credit is “deposited” in our account so that God can look at us with favor, seeing no sin, but only perfect deeds. Not only that, but our sin is imputed to Jesus. Once the exchange takes place, believers are justified, which simply means “declared right or righteous” before God.

What extravagant love and mercy! Paul is so overcome by this “great exchange,” as Martin Luther calls it, that he can’t stop using the word “grace”— three times in just two sentences. He also refers to the imputation believers receive as the “gift of God”, the impossible thing God did when He saw who we once were (v. 8)! Thank God for

Christ, heaven's perfect remedy for earth's spiritual deadness. This is the part where Frankenstein's story and ours splits. Where Victor abandons the monstrous beast, God transforms us with new life in the gospel, giving us a new nature in Jesus.

Q: *Explain the exchange that took place on the cross.*

Q: *Why is this exchange better than simply working harder to get God's approval?*

## THE RESULTS: WHO WE ARE NOW

### EPHESIANS 2:7, 10, 13-22

Q: *Now that you are in Christ, what does God say about you in these verses?*

Q: *What is "workmanship," in your own words?*

Now that we understand who we were (those trapped in depravity), and how God remedied the situation we were in (imputation and justification through Christ), Ephesians 2 tells us who we are as a result. If Christ has given us a new nature and we are no longer monsters, what does this new creation look like? Verse 7 tells us the first piece of good news: we are "raised up" with Christ and "seated with him in the heavenly places." "Raised up" means that we are given spiritual life now through the Holy Spirit, and we can also look forward to God giving us a fully renewed, resurrected body when Christ returns. Being seated with Christ means that Jesus shares his status and authority with us now, as we represent his name in all the earth. It also means that we will one day jointly rule with him over a renewed world, sharing his position before the Father (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17). This reminds us of our identity all the way back in Genesis. We were made to be God-worshipping creations who lovingly rule the earth (Gen 1:28). By making us alive through Christ, God is bringing us back to what we were always meant to be: new creations who finally love God again and share a royal, ruling seat with Jesus! In the gospel, we are restored to being the true worshippers and rulers we were originally designed to be. This is what "raised up" and "seated with Christ" means for us now.

While Paul could have stopped there, he had much more ground to cover. Verse 10 gives us even more detail about who we are now in Christ: God's "workmanship." But we are not simply a masterpiece that hangs lifelessly on a wall. Instead, we are a masterpiece that has a purpose, a function, and a life inside of it. And what is our purpose as God's masterpiece? To do the "good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (v. 10). Our job as God's "workmanship" is to move out into the world, doing the same type of works that Christ did! We weren't

meant to sit still. As new creations with new hearts, we walk away from the old, sinful works that used to fill our time, and we walk in new, life-giving works that God has planned for us to do.

♀: *Explain how being “raised and seated with Christ” restores you back to the original design God has for you.*

♀: *How does it feel to know that God has already prepared the works He has for you to do?*

On top of this, verses 13-22 tell us even more about who we are now in Christ. First, we are “brought near” (v.13). God’s goal in dealing with our sin isn’t simply to change our record, or even to get us in a fit condition to do good works again, it is to bring us close to Him again so that we can be reunited with the Father we were estranged from for far too long! We are not God’s Frankenstein project, brought to life so we can ease the panic and worry of a frantic creator, do his bidding, and then be abandoned as a freakish mistake. No, we were brought to life to enjoy the perfect Father and share in Jesus’ position as a child in the family. We were brought near to live out good works, yes, but also to be richly loved and cherished forever.

Next, we are a people “at peace” with both God and others (v. 13-17). Given that the wrath we deserved ended up on Christ’s head instead of ours, there is only peace for us to enjoy now. The war with God is over and the price for treason is fully paid! We are finally at peace with heaven. And given that we are at peace with God, anyone else who is at peace with God is now considered not just a friend or even a family member, but “one” with us (v. 15). Our fellow Christian, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or our cultural background, is as much a part of God’s family as we are. Instead of seeing ourselves as various subsets of Christians who are segregated from one another, being “at peace” means that we are all unified now in the Church, “one new man in place of the two” (v. 15). Where there was once incredible hostility between groups like the Jews and the Gentiles, Christ abolished everything that would divide us and made us equal before him—equally condemned in our sin, equally restored by God through the gospel, and given equal access to the Father through the Holy Spirit (v. 18)! .

♀: *Who do you find it easy to be at peace with? Are there any people in your life that you find it difficult to be at peace with?*

♀: *Explain how the gospel can create peace between people who are usually hostile to one another.*



Lastly, we learn that we are “fellow citizens” with all other Christians in the “household of God”, one that houses the Spirit himself (v.19-22). Instead being strangers or foreigners on the outside looking in, through Jesus we are finally now included in the “people of God.” Now that we are in God’s family through Christ, we get to enjoy all the promises, covenants, and blessings that we once had no access to! As more and more believers are added to this “household,” we grow into a “holy temple of the Lord,” where the Holy Spirit unites us all. Instead of the physical temple being a place or a building where God’s presence dwells, the Church is now where God lives.

Because of Christ, we are no longer monsters trapped in destructiveness. We are made into new creations who love God and can rule the earth lovingly again (2 Cor. 5:17-19). Because of Christ, we are now restored, made new, alive, at peace, brought near, unified with others, and included in God’s family both now and eternally in the future. What amazing grace this is, thanks to Jesus!

## NEXT STEPS

*+ Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- Q: How can you use what you learned about “depravity” in this lesson to help your witness to lost friends? What things can you point to in the world to show that it is broken (or depraved) and in need of a Savior?*
- Q: Write out how you would explain “imputation” or “justification” to a person unfamiliar with Christianity. Explain why these words give you great joy.*
- Q: Though God makes our new identity clear in Ephesians 2, we often forget and assume that we are still monsters who can’t change. Which parts of your new identity do you most often forget? What steps can you take this week to better remind yourself of who you truly are in Christ?*
- Q: In Christ, we are now “at peace” with those who are very different from us. What certain person or group of people have you built “walls of hostility” against, though Christ has torn them down? For those in Ephesus, it was the racial hostility between the Jews and the Greeks. Who is it for you?*

## PRAY

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- God, remind me often of who I once was before knowing Christ so that my thankfulness will be overflowing on a daily basis.
- God, remind me even more often of what you did to remedy my monstrous situation through Christ and who I am now because of his work.
- God, identify any particular believer or any group of believers in my life that I allow to remain separated from me instead of “one” with me. If there is any one I still keep a “wall of hostility” built up against, please tear it down.
- God, bring other believers in my life who will remind me of my new identity in you, and give me those who I may remind as well.

## COMMENTARY

**EPHESIANS 2:1** “Trespasses” are violations of divine commandments. “Sins” are offenses against God in thought, word, or deed, which include not only our actions but our very internal nature as well (also seen in v. 3).

**EPHESIANS 2:1-3** Paul paints a picture of humans as both monstrous and helpless. Contrary to the popular opinion that “God helps those who help themselves” (which comes from Aesop’s fables, not the Bible) human reality is just the opposite: God helps those unable to help themselves and trapped in depravity. Even more, He helps His enemies.

**EPHESIANS 2:2** The “prince of the power of the air” refers to the Devil as he dominates humans. These humans are called “sons of disobedience,” a Hebrew-inspired phrase “sons of this world” in contrast to “sons of light” (Luke 16:8). These people belong to the household of those who rebel against the holy and true God as opposed to those who belong in God’s household.

**EPHESIANS 2:5-6** The emphasis on being “raised” with Christ points the power of the resurrection, the ability God has to make things alive and new. The picture of Christ being seated in the heavenly places points to the ultimate authority Jesus has in the world. The church in Ephesus definitely needed to be reminded of these truths in a culture obsessed with supernatural powers through magic and the occult. Paul is helping them (and us) see that the power of the living God in Christ trumps all competing authorities in this world or in the supernatural

realm. To remain resolute in our allegiance to Christ as the supreme power in our lives and in the world, we must remember these truths as well, or we will choose the culture's way of viewing power and authority.

**EPHESIANS 2:11-12** Paul uses a term that was common to political life in ancient cities like Ephesus. “Strangers” were complete foreigners with no rights or privileges (Acts 16:20–23). “Aliens” were non-citizens who dwelt in the city and were accorded customary privileges as neighbors. Only “citizens” had full protections and rights in the city (Acts 21:39). He uses this to show that as citizens of God's household, we are no longer considered foreigners to God. We get all the privileges, rights, and promises before God that a true citizen would.

*\*All commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, The Reformation Study Bible Notes, and the NIV Compact Bible Commentary*

