

Lesson 1

A New Identity

Living as God’s Masterpiece: The Art of Grace-Filled Living

Before You Begin:

Read Ephesians 2.1-10.

Pray for insight, asking God for understanding, wisdom, and the ability to see how these things apply to your life.

Set Your Intentions: Ask yourself what you hope to achieve from this lesson.

Journal Your Thoughts. Journaling can be a valuable tool for spiritual reflection and growth.

Introduction

In this lesson, we discuss the concept of salvation and how it is often brought to light by the beautiful metaphor of adoption. Ephesians 2 and the teachings of Paul profoundly manifest this, depicting our unparalleled journey from spiritual desolation to divine belonging. Here, by exploring God’s initiative, the reason behind our salvation, and its transformative results, we can see a parallel to the adoption process, where one is chosen, redeemed, and given a new identity.

How did God make our salvation happen? The first ten verses of Ephesians 2 detail how God brought it all about. Here, Paul tells us how God moved with swift urgency to save us from spiritual disaster and His wrath. He also goes into detail about the depths of our desperate situation. Here we learn:

- How *God took the initiative* to save.
- Why *God decided* to save.
- The result of the salvation *God provides*.

There are some fantastic contrasts presented here:

Powerful Contrasts in Ephesians 2.1-7

YOUR PAST LIFE	YOUR NEW LIFE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dead in Sin (2.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alive in Christ (2.5-6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enslaved to the Spirit of the Age (2.2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freed to Sit with Christ in Heaven (2.6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of Wrath (2.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipient of Endless Kindness (2.7)

All these things are simply amazing. They are incomprehensible. They are incredibly awesome! We are recipients of His power. We are in His care. We are recipients of His compassion. We have been lavished with love! And to think, this is all about God's plan and His activity. You are breathing today because of His magnificent love, abundant grace, and rich grace. We must hold on to these facts and keep them in our minds.

In this lesson, we want to focus on our new identity in Christ. But before we do, embracing the present reality of our salvation is crucial.

Your Salvation: A Present Reality

The contrast between 2.3 and 2.4 cannot be more significant. In these verses, we observe two groupings of people: *children under wrath* and a different set of children who have been shown *mercy*. Inherent in all of this is our choice. We may choose to be either God's enemies or His children. Those who choose God receive *mercy*, which is the removal of punishment that is deserved.

John writes:

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, 1 John 4.9-10.

God took the initiative by demonstrating pity and compassion toward us after we fell into a situation that we could not escape without help. The fact that we became victims because of our bad choices did not prevent God from having mercy. God loves us no matter what.

In the previous chapter, Paul spoke about the *power* available to *us who believe*, 1.19-20. By his power, God raised Jesus from the dead. By that same power, God raises us from spiritual death, 2.5. *God brings dead people to life*. God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly places by his *power*, 1.20b. By that same power, God has *seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*, 2.5b. Just as Jesus lives forever and reigns triumphantly, so do God's children continue in spiritual life and triumph over the old life of human failure. *What you were, you are no longer, by the grace of God*.

In Ephesians 2.5, *saved* is written in the present tense. Salvation by grace is not just a future promise but a present reality. Notice how Paul goes on to describe that reality:

- You are alive *together* with Christ.
- You have been raised up *together* with Christ.
- You are *seated together* with Christ.

A Parallel Text

giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, Colossians 1.12-13.

Please focus on the words *rescued* and *transfer*. These are powerful. *Rescued* means "to be delivered." This is God's ultimate goal in history.

Look at how Jesus summarized His mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, Luke 4.18.

Transferred means “a change of state, emphasizing the difference in the resulting state.” It is “a change in position,” “a change of residence.” You have been taken from Satan’s domain and transferred to God’s.

Now let’s examine Colossians 2.12-14:

when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.

You had piled up a debt before God. Its payment was death. Now, Jesus caused it all to be set aside. Your sins were nailed to His cross.

The Best News Ever

For you are saved by grace through faith, not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast, Ephesians 2.8-9.

When Paul says, this is not from yourselves; he is teaching that salvation is a gift from God’s abundant kindness and lavish grace. There is nothing within us that has inclined God to choose us. There will never be enough good deeds to warrant a favorable verdict from God on the day of judgment. God’s way of salvation eliminates human boasting.

Your New Identity: A Masterpiece of Grace

In Ephesians 2.7, Paul wrote that God wants to demonstrate the immeasurable riches of His grace through Jesus for all eternity. True love and grace will always find a way to express themselves to the benefit of the one loved. We have a God who is eager to display his lovingkindness.

He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his faithful love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows what we are made of, remembering that we are dust, Psalm 103.10-14.

It was Malachi who said that we are *God’s treasured possession*. We will always be His treasured possession. Now, and forever more.

God’s Workmanship

Let’s look at verse 10. “For” connects to the verb in 2.8a. Paul is building on his point that salvation has nothing to do with human effort. Here, Paul uses two words to speak of this new creation: *workmanship* and *created*. “Workmanship” emphasizes the *craftsmanship* or *design* of the creator, such as the potter’s skill in producing a jar . . . or the literary skill of a writer in composing poetry. See how some of the other translations handle this word:

- NIV: *we are God’s handiwork.*
- NLT: *For we are God’s masterpiece.*

- NAB: *handiwork*.
- NJB: *work of art*.

It is not that “we will be” God’s workmanship. But “we are” God’s workmanship. It is written in the *present tense*, meaning right now. You are God’s work of art –even with all your imperfections and room to grow. Who are you in Christ? You are a living display of grace. You are someone special. You are valuable. You are important. You mean something. God loves you.

God’s Creation

“Created” is the more common word for God’s act of creation. The exact wording is found in 2 Corinthians 5.17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

And Paul would use it in Ephesians 4.24. He says you are a new person who has been *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*.

Why Did God Recreate You?

Why have you been recreated in Christ Jesus? *For good **works***. You display God’s grace by doing good works. Your works are NEVER about you. They’re all about God and who He is. Paul is stressing that the new order of our life produces good works. Here, works are not performed to secure salvation but as the fruit of salvation. Good works are the *fruit*, not the *root*, of the tree of salvation.

Jesus said:

I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit because you can do nothing without me, John 15.5.

Those in Christ will bear much fruit, not as a requirement for admission, but as a result of intimate union. If there are no good works in your life, it is evidence or symptom of a fundamental problem: a lack of a vital relationship with Christ. If you’re lost after having once been saved, it’s not going to be because you didn’t work enough ... it’s going to be because you didn’t know Jesus as you should. The more you understand the Father, the more you’ll imitate Him.

Embrace Your New Status:

As we go through the ups and downs of living in the flesh, it is prevalent for Christians to fight fierce battles with the flesh. After we sin, we must refuse to dwell in disappointment. When we do, it is essential to remember our righteousness.

- **You have been made new**, 2 Corinthians 5.17. Now, you walk in newness of life, Romans 6.4.
- **You have eternal life**, Titus 3.7.
- **You have become fit for the presence of God**, Ephesians 2.19.
- **You have purified your soul by obeying the truth**, 1 Peter 1.22. Remember that you have obeyed the gospel. You have believed, repented, and been baptized. In 1.22, *purified* is in the

present perfect tense, indicating past action with continuing results.

- **You have been washed, purified, and given new life.** When you were baptized, you put on the new man, Ephesians 4.24.
- **You have been recreated for righteousness and holiness.** This birth is not by *perishable seed*, but *imperishable*, 1 Peter 1.22-23.
- **You are now a *partaker of the divine nature*,** 2 Peter 1.4. God has given you a new identity.

We must never steal God's glory by discounting what He has made us. Rather than living in constant disappointment with ourselves, we must live the way Paul does in Romans 7. Upon examining ourselves, we will find we do things we do not want. We will do things that are inconsistent with who we are. As we do, **we need to see that sin as an intrusion into who we are in Christ.** We must hate the sin we see, confess it to God, and treat it, at best, as an unwelcome guest or, at worst, as an invasion by a fierce and threatening enemy.

But that is no longer who you are. **Sin no longer defines who you are.** You have been redeemed as Christ's possession. You *want to do what is good*. You *do not want to do what is evil*. You want to serve the law of God. **This is who you are in Christ.** Paul looked forward to the day he would be delivered from his body of sin and death, Romans 7.24. Death will involve separation from the physical body. You will be liberated from the flesh and set free to be everything you were created to be when you were made new in Christ.

What's In This for Us?

Embrace Your New Identity in Christ Daily. Just as an adopted child grows into their new family identity, Christians are called to embrace their identity as children of God daily. Begin each day with a prayer, thanking God for His mercy and grace and asking for His guidance to live out your identity in Christ. Affirmations based on scripture can reinforce your sense of belonging and purpose, reminding you that you are loved, chosen, and redeemed.

Live Out the Reality of Your Spiritual Adoption Through Acts of Kindness. Our adoption into God's family is marked by love and grace; we're called to reflect these in our dealings with others. Look for opportunities to extend kindness and compassion to those around you, mirroring the mercy you've received. This could be as simple as lending a listening ear, offering support to someone in need, or volunteering your time and resources to help others. Acts of kindness are practical expressions of God's love through us.

Build Your Belonging Within the Body of Christ. Being adopted into God's family means we are part of His church. Actively participate in your local congregation to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection. Engage in small group studies, join service projects, or try to build relationships with fellow believers. Encouraging, serving, and bearing one another's burdens are practical ways to live out your spiritual adoption and strengthen the body of Christ.

Reflect on Your Journey and Share Your Story. Just as an adopted child might reflect on their journey to becoming part of their family, reflect on your spiritual life. Journaling can be a powerful tool for this, helping you see how God has worked in your life. Sharing your story with others can be an encouragement to them and a testimony to God's grace. It's a reminder that God is still active and working, drawing people to Himself and transforming lives.

Extend the Invitation of Spiritual Adoption to Others. As someone who has experienced the transformative power of being adopted into God's family, you can share this gift with others. Engage in conversations about faith, offer to pray for and with those exploring Christianity, and be ready to communicate the reason for your hope. Invite friends to church services or events to learn more about God's love and the beauty of a relationship with God. Being a bridge for others to find their way into God's family is one of the most profound ways to live out the grace you've been given.

Conclusion

Our journey of spiritual adoption not only redefines our relationship with God but also reshapes our understanding of ourselves. We are no longer defined by our past or sins but by our new status in Christ—as part of God's family, destined for good works and bearers of His image. Embracing this truth empowers us to live out our days in confidence, not in the shadow of our former selves but in the light of God's redeeming love.

Christians are called to remember and live out our adopted status. Just as adoption changes the life trajectory of a child, being adopted into Christ has altered our eternal destiny. We are invited to leave behind the old domains of sin and death and step into the light of God's kingdom, walking in the newfound identity and purpose He has graciously given us. Through this understanding, we can genuinely appreciate the depths of God's love and the transformative power of spiritual adoption.

Thought Questions for Discussion:

1. How does the concept of adoption in human families mirror our spiritual adoption into God's family?
2. What does being a 'child of God' mean to you personally, and how does it influence your daily life and decisions?
3. How does understanding your identity as God's adopted child impact your view of yourself and others around you?
4. In what ways have you experienced the transformative power of God's grace and mercy in your life? Can you share a specific instance where you felt truly embraced by God's love?

5. Ephesians 2 speaks of moving from death to life through Christ's mercy and power. How does this transition manifest in the lives of Christians today?
6. Considering the act of choosing involved in adoption, what does it mean to you that God chose you to be a part of His family?
7. How can the church better represent the inclusive, adopting love of God to those outside the four walls of its building?
8. Discuss the challenge of living out our new identity in Christ amid a world that often does not understand or accept it. How do you navigate this tension?
9. Reflect on the concept of 'good works' being the fruit of our salvation, not the root. How can believers demonstrate these fruits in their community and daily interactions?
10. Spiritual adoption brings with it a new inheritance and promises from God. How do these promises shape the hope and perspective of believers, especially during difficult times?