

Mystery & Clarity//Ephesians 2:1–10//Mystery #3, “But God”

Intro:

- Y'all take these videos seriously.... We have a church planting team that lives not far from Ephesus and that was one of our team members reading this passage on location there from Ephesus
- Real quick: Later today... your CP will tell you about some special developments regarding *Believe* and a meeting on Monday night where we'll present a plan to purchase 2 warehouses at Brier Creek and 23 acres of land. It's an exciting time for our church. Really want you to be there this Monday.
- One housekeeping thing. Last week I was inundated with people telling me how I ruined their desires to have LASIK surgery... I feel bad, because for all the drama I told you about I actually had a great experience. And I felt *really* bad b/c inbetween 2 of the services I was approached by one of our church members who is also LASIK surgeon... she found me and offer me a few thoughts about the message... So, as a payback to her... *Today's sermon is sponsored by Dr. Tonica Johnson at NC Eye, Ears, Nose, and Throat Lasik surgery.* (**Tonica Johnson Picture**)

I'm going to start off by reading a verse that is really negative... but before I do, I want to tell you that the backdrop of this verse is really positive. Ephesians 2:1 BIBLE says that we, as a race, are dead in our sins. But the backdrop of that is that God created us good and that's what makes this so shocking...

- We were created in God's image, and because of that we were capable of extraordinary acts of goodness and courage and love.

- We all see that... we see a man selflessly take care of his wife in their old age; we know people who have sacrificed their lives for their friends, sometimes for even complete strangers.
- I see it all the time right here in our church... the way so many of you responded when I presented the 5 areas... (hand) homeless; prisoners; unwed mothers; dropouts; foster... things on our church's heart; so many of you came forward and said, “We want to help!” You overflow with selfless ideas... that's because you are created in the image of God.

That's one of the things that make Paul's indictment in vs 1 so shocking. **1 And you were dead in trespasses and sins...** It's offensive, and I want to focus on 2 words in this verse that dispel 2 very ingrained myths our culture has about evil.

The 1st is the word “you:” *You* are dead in trespasses and sin. Not other people, but *you... you* were dead...

- You see, we all recognize that some people are bad, but we always think it is somebody “out there” who has the problem.
 - So we put locks on our houses to keep the bad people out, and then locks on top of the locks and a security system on top of the locks and a dog on top of the security system and a gun just in case they get through all of that...
 - Whatever culture you're in, you tend to look at people outside of that culture as bad. Other nations, other religions, they have the problems. So, we need a strong national defense to keep all them out.
 - Let me give you an example right here in our own country. If you were raised as a religious conservative, as many of you were, it's the dirty libs who are the problem: **Hollywood; MSNBC; all the ladies on the View except Elizabeth Hasselback.** They're all depraved; they're

destroying family values and undercutting the backbone of society.

- Of course, the ironic thing is that they are sitting around this morning thinking about how bad we are. People in the church are judgmental and proud and cause strife and war. (And, in a lot of ways, Jesus agrees with them. Jesus taught that religion brings out the worst in people. Religion has a tendency to make people proud, and that is the mother of all sins. Religious people killed Jesus.)
- Or, a lot of time we think it was people who lived a long time ago who had the problems. But we've progressed; we're educated and globalized and sophisticated.
 - And, of course, there are some ways that is true... when it comes to issues like the equality of women and racism we have progressed. But there's a whole new set of vices now that we celebrate. Religious people are more fundamentalist and violent than ever; people are greedier and crave power more than ever. We've got more sexual depravity and family dysfunction than ever. Plus, we're the proudest and most self-sufficient generation to ever walk the face of the earth. And for all our progress, the bloodiest century of mankind was the 20th century. The Bible teaches that, as a race, we're not getting better, if anything, we're getting worse. I don't believe in evolution, if anything, I believe in devolution. We didn't come from monkeys, but I believe it sure looks like we are headed there.

The point is: there are no categories in the Bible. There's not religious and irreligious; not primitive and advanced; educated or backwards; just bad people and Jesus.

- Or, let me show you this one other way: Whenever we have a problem in a relationship, we usually think it's the other person who has the problem, not us.
 - I have yet to do marriage counseling where a couple came in and sat down and each said sincerely, "No, no, it's not her, it's me. I've got the problems." No, it's always the other person.
 - Elizabeth Taylor has been married 8 times, and each time of course, it's was her husband's fault. After a while, you are like, "You know, the common denominator is you."
- For many of you, in every broken relationship of your past, you always see yourself as the victim... *Your parents were idiots; your boss was a jerk; your roommate was unreasonable.* Some of you college girls are on your 5th roommate in 3 years, and each living arrangement ends in disaster. You're like, "But you don't understand... this girl was a slob, and this other one, she was jealous all the time and this one talked too much and this one was too impatient with me." Again, the common denominator is you.
- **You know that conversation you have when you break up with somebody and you're like, "It's not you, it's me."** God is saying, "No, it's not Me, it is you."
- I've noticed I get most annoyed at things in others that I freely do myself ... **sitting at the light**, person in front of me doesn't go. I'm like, "I can't believe this... oh, I see, they're texting." Filled with righteous indignation... And, anybody who knows me knows, "I am the last person on earth who has the right to be angry at someone else for texting while driving." For you 40 or so cops who go to our church... that's a thing of the past... as of right now.

- Or I hear my daughters yelling at each other upstairs... I go upstairs and scream at them: “We don’t talk to each other like that in this family!”

All the problems, all the dysfunction of the world is not “out there,” it’s right in the mirror. *You* are dead.

The second key word that challenges how our culture looks at sin is the word, “dead.” That refutes the myth that sin is primarily something we do rather than who we are. Most of us think of sin as a set of bad things we do: adultery; stealing; racism; watching *Grey’s Anatomy*.

- But the word “dead” shows us that sin is not an action, it’s a condition of our heart. It’s not that we do bad things and that makes us bad, we do bad things *because* we’re bad. It’s not that we steal and cheat and therefore that makes us greedy; we steal and cheat *because* we are by nature greedy.
- In other words, ***we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.***
 - I see this in my kids. No one has taught my kids how to be jerks to each other. They were born experts at it.
 - Nobody taught my youngest daughter to lie. She didn’t get that from her environment. My kid takes her food and dumps it on the floor. That’s not from her environment. Veronica and I don’t do that. (She’s not like, “oh... mom and dad don’t dump their food on the floor”) My wife and I don’t run around screaming “MINE” to each other over various things. She didn’t learn that selfishness entirely from her environment.
 - That’s her nature. She was born a sinner. A Varsity level sinner.
 - Sometimes it amazes me how much I have to tell my 2 year old No. I don’t walk around the house saying to her, “Yes, Ryah... yes, yes... good...” Instead, I am like, “No, no, no... don’t punch your sister. Don’t destroy the tower of blocks they are building. Why do you have

so much joy destroying their stuff? Don’t throw your sisters outfit into the gas logs.”

- We are dead. Don’t know if you’ve ever embraced what that means, but in your nature you are dead and decaying.
 - ***Illus.*** You ever see that Tupperware thing back at the back of our refrigerator... piece of steak. Smell it... you pass out, wake up 4 hours later? How many of you when that happens, the problem is it doesn’t have enough spice. Little ketchup, black pepper sauce... can’t smell the rotting meat anymore! The problem is, it is dead. When you put it in the refrigerator it was dead. I hope. You can preserve it for a little while. But it is already cursed to rot.
 - We are, in our nature, spiritually dead, and we are rotting... we may smell ok for a while, and we may learn to cover up the areas of stench in our lives with religion or manners or culture, but we are dead.

Vs. 2, he describes what spiritual death looks like:

2 (sins) in which you once walked, following the course of this world,

- Introduces 3 phrases to you all of which say the same thing...
- We followed the course of the world. What is the course of this world? St. Augustine said 1500 years ago that our world marches to the drumbeat of 3 things: money/sex/power
 - Money: the world is obsessed with getting more money.
 - Sex: we obey the desires of our body even when it’s bad for us or for other or against God’s design
 - Power: We’re obsessed with power and always looking to get more of it by whatever means... we want to be smartest or best looking or most religious or richest because that gives us power over others.
 - The world worships those 3 things, and gives them the devotion that they ought to give to God

2nd phrase

... following the prince of the power of the air, Satan the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

- I say “someone following Satan” and you get the image of a guy with a bunch of tattoos out in the woods sacrificing animals. But this verse shows you that Satan is the one in and behind the attractiveness of making money, sex and power appear attractive. The one following Satan is not the one sacrificing kittens at midnight; it’s the one following the course of this world.

3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,

- Again, this is just another way of saying the same thing. Our lives are controlled by the desires of our body and our minds, rather than the will of God.
 - Our body says “have sex,” we obey it. Our body says, “Spend a bunch of money on me.” And we obey. Our body says, “Live a life of luxury, no matter how stingy you have to be or who you have to hurt.” We obey.
- We don’t want anybody to make the rules or control us.
- I teach my kids that sin is the big “I” problem. I want to be in control rather than God; I want to call the shots; my desires are more important than the will of God
- We have expressed our self-will both in sins of commission and omission. Commission—things we do that we shouldn’t do; omission—things we failed to do that we ought to have done. We usually think in terms of commission, but the much bigger sins are ones of omission. It’s not just that we are selfish and we steal and we do things to hurt others, we have failed to love God supremely in our hearts and to love others like we love ourselves.

..and we were (some of you are not going to like this, but you need to learn to love it because it’s the truth) by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

- Children of wrath? Wait... you sure that’s what it says in Greek? Maybe it says, “Children of sadness,” or “confused children.” No, it says Wrath. Children who deserved only God’s wrath. Why? Because what we have done, what you have done, and what I have done, is cosmic treason.
- We kicked God off of the throne and put ourselves there in His place.
- And then, in every possible way, we minimized Him and glorified ourselves. We served ourselves, not Him. We exploited creation for our purposes, not His. We made our desires the Lord of our lives, not His will. This is seen in all we do, even in our lack of self-control.
 - **Illustration:** For example, many guys feel like they can’t say no to pornography... desires are just too strong. I always tell them they could turn off their lust for porn like a light switch. They’re like, “How? Impossible.” Imagine this... you’re looking at porn on your computer... suddenly your mom walks in the room. Desire off like a light switch. What just happened? It’s not that you lost your lust for porn, or developed great self-control, it’s the fear of what your mom would say, or the embarrassment of being caught, was greater than your lust for the image and drove it out. **Now think about that in relation to God.** You know that God is always watching... but the thought of what He thinks about it is not enough to make you turn away from sin. If you took God even as seriously as you took your mother, you wouldn’t look at pornography. You’ve minimized God to the point that the thought of His presence doesn’t make you hesitate anymore about sin.
- And that unspeakable blasphemy, that cosmic treason, deserves God’s wrath.
- We think, “Well, God should just get over it. Forgive and forget.”

bent of our life is so evil that it's hard to even call our goodness really "goodness."

We deserve the wrath of God. Again, some of you don't like to hear that, but you need to hear it and you need to learn to embrace it and to love it, because it is the truth, and only by knowing the truth can you ever be set free. *We deserve God's wrath...*

Our blasphemy against God deserves the eternal punishment of hell. Hell is a terrible place, so offensive to educated people; but hell is not one degree worse than we deserve.

Some of you are thinking, "This is the worst Valentine's Day message I have ever heard..." (You're like, "I already feel bad enough on Valentine's Day, and now it's like God is giving me one of those little Valentine hearts with the words "You suck" written on it.)

Vs. 4. Vs. 4 begins with the largest conjunction in the universe

4 But God...

(let the force of that hit you for a minute. You are helpless, but not hopeless...)

4 ...being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

- many theologians and Christians talk about salvation so coldly and doctrinally... like it's a ritual or rite of passage. Our salvation it is bathed in tender love
- the reason worship has not exploded alive in some of your hearts is because you have no concept of how much mercy God has showed to us; we were objects of God's wrath and God loved us anyway. He absorbed hell into Himself to save us.

- But we want God to be mad at everyone else's sin. We see injustice in other places and we think God should be mad at that. We see greed and exploitation on Wall Street and say, "That should be punished." We see injustice taking place in parts of Africa and China and we say, "That ought to be punished." We're ok with God being mad at others. We're ok with God being mad at Satan. But we're not ok with God being mad at us.
- We think, "God should just forgive us... isn't that what He does?" But for God to turn His back to our sin and not make it right would be unjust, and we love justice, don't we? We always cry out for it when someone treats us unjustly... The bank makes an error and you lose \$10 grand, you go down to the bank and demand justice.
 - This is why there are horns on our car. We want to let people know, "**What you just did, that is a transgression and you are in sin and I am punishing you... with noise.**"
- We deserve to be punished... and there's nobody we can pass the blame to.
 - We can't blame **the world** for being a bad influence, because who created the world system? We did... We can't **blame Satan** (because he never forces us to do anything. He simply baits the hook and lets us bite it. He can only tempt us with things we already in our natures love.
- You say, but haven't we all done good things? I'm a big *History Channel* guy... (my inner nerd) one of the most confusing, and disturbing images: *Hitler playing with kids*.
 - Genuinely seems to care about them. But we see that in the scope of his whole life, a life consumed by absolutely atrocious evil.
 - What if our rebellion to God was the same way in God's sight? Our cosmic treason means that the whole

- And every page of this book drips with love and mercy, and you've got to start learning to read the Bible that way... , and until you start seeing the Bible that way you won't get it; History professor at Duke
- The reason some of you don't worship with passion is that you have no concept of the depths of depravity from which God has saved you; or the glorious love He used to do it. You live the squishy, mealy, boring middle.

5 ...made us alive together with Christ...

- Notice this is past tense... It's a reference to the work of Jesus.
 - This is the Gospel: Jesus came to earth and lived the life (perfect)... but then he died the death I had been condemned to die, in my place. He absorbed in his perfect life the curse of my death.
 - There was a curse on sin that justice demanded had to be carried out. God had said in Genesis 2:17 that the one who sins would die. God can't lie or break His word.
 - Christ died; He satisfied the curse. Justice was served. But because He was innocent man who died a cursed death, I can be released from my curse. Because He shared in my death; I can share in His resurrection. Because He died for me; I can live in Him.

6 ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places...

- Not "will seat," but "has seated." In God's eyes, I am already seated with Christ at the place of honor around God's throne. I couldn't be in a higher place in heaven, closer to God. I'm in Jesus' seat.
- In other words, salvation is already accomplished. It's already mine.
- Paul says, "As long as Christ is seated at the right hand of God, you can be secure in your salvation."

5...Paul interjects *by grace you have been saved...*

- Notice he used the word, "saved." I've told you before my frustration with the word "saved." It sounds redneck. Something Nascar fans say. "I got saved." I wish we had another word for it, but there is just no other word to describe what happened to us. In light of what God has done, you can't say I got improved or enhanced or rebooted, I got *saved*!
- It was "by grace," which means I did not earn any part of it and really had nothing to do with it.
 - We were *dead*. Dead people don't do things. They don't decide things. Dead people don't say one day, "I'm tired of being dead, I think I'll get up and live a few more years." You were dead. You didn't decide you wanted to know God or that you wanted to live spiritually. You couldn't decide that. You were *dead*. God makes alive.
 - **The new birth is like your 1st birth:** I had nothing to do with my 1st birth (I wasn't doing anything to bring it about. God and my parents made that happen with no help from me). Same thing with my 2nd birth. God did it all, from start to finish.
- Americans prefer to see sin as an action rather than as a condition because if sin is an action then we feel like we can cure it on our own with a checklist of good actions... we're the "can do" people. I read my Bible; I don't cheat on my taxes; I didn't cuss this week (well, twice and that's b/c the roads were icy and that's excusable). Therefore I'm ok. And all that checklist does is cover up the fact that our hearts don't love and desire God at all we're still spiritually dead. We're dead and only a God who makes alive can save us.
- The most important and offensive truth to grasp about salvation is that it is something you can't in anyway do or even contribute to. God has to do it all from start to finish.

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus

- I love this verse. The church is God's eternal demonstration community (like His trophy case). In the ages to come, for all eternity, we will be the people who get to demonstrate firsthand God's grace. We get to tell 1st hand stories of our experience with grace. The angels can't do that. There are millions of them, and they can do some pretty impressive things, but none of them can say they have experienced God's grace. We alone are redeemed. Our eternal privilege... it's what we do!
- The book of Revelation says that in heaven we will have Jesus' name actually written on our foreheads... Which means for all eternity we're like a sign that points to God's incredible grace. I won't have a sign that says, "man of great courage" Or "wonderful husband" or "pastor of the Summit Church;" I'll have one that says "Jesus."
- It's one of the reasons I want you to learn to love the truth about your depravity, because only then can you celebrate and be overwhelmed by the depths of God's glorious grace and love for you.

Vs. 8 the summary of all of this: **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.**

These verses summarizes the 4 crucial things about salvation Paul has been trying to teach...

(1) The cause of salvation is grace.

- See that word "this"? In Greek, it is written so that it applies to both faith and grace. The whole salvation process, even the faith to be saved, is not your own doing, but something God does in us.
- God did it all. If you are saved, it is because God woke you up, restored you to your senses, and gave you even the ability to believe.

(2) The means of salvation is faith.

- Paul says, "Salvation happens *through* faith." Faith is the means by which God's salvation comes to us.
- What does it mean to have faith? Very important: Faith is not a religious feeling, or a virtue, it is the belief that Christ has done it all and that it is finished.
- Faith is believing that that Christ has *already* (in the past) saved us! That Christ is already seated at the right hand of God.
- When you believe that, Christ's salvation is suddenly, all at once, given to you.
- My 2 favorite analogies for salvation. *Background... I was a doubter*
 - Like a chair... this chair represents that Christ has died for you. True whether you believe it or not. Faith is when you sit down in it. A lot of times people can't remember when they sat down and so they start to doubt whether or not they are saved. Think about the chair (or pew, WCC) you're sitting in right now. At some point you made a decision to sit down in it. How do you know? Because you remember that decision? No. You know you made it by the fact you are sitting down.
 - Right now, right at this moment, you are either believing Christ has done it all and resting in it or you are standing on your own. If I asked you, "If God asked you why He should let you into heaven," what would you say? If you say... because of x, y, z, you are standing in your righteousness. If you say, "Because Christ has done it all and I'm resting in it," you are saved, whether you can remember when you first sat down or not. You've either received what Christ has done for you and are resting in it or you are not.
 - **To sit down in this chair means you have acknowledged that Jesus is the Lord and that He died**

**to save you and your salvation has been purchased.
Are you sitting there right now?**

- The other one is that of an ambulance...
- I still remember when this all suddenly made sense to me. I was 18 years old, so struggling to find assurance. I was reading Martin Luther's commentary on Romans... I suddenly realized it was all done... Christ was seated at God's right hand and I believed it. And, in the words of Martin Luther, *"Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."*

▪ **John Bunyan:** "One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And... with the eyes of my soul I saw Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he lacks my righteousness, for that was just in front of him.

I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today and, and forever."

Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God."¹

(3) The effects of salvation: good works

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- Salvation is by faith, but it produces, always, good works. And if you don't have good works, there's no way you've been saved.
- If you are saved, God is recreating you as His workmanship. He puts His heart and His desires into you. If those are not there, you are not saved.
- **We're not saved by good works; we're validated by good works. We're saved by faith; the effect is good works.**
- We have a new nature.
 - Dog vomit... you and your rules. No commands are necessary. You don't have to threaten punishment.

(4) The promise of salvation: what God started, He will finish

- This passage ends by giving you a secret to releasing the incredible power of salvation in your life.
- It tells you that you are a work of God. Literally, in Greek, a "poema." God is composing you into something that glorifies Him. And it tells you that God has already pre-determined the end of that work, that you will be complete and perfect and beautiful.
- That truth gives me such encouragement. Because there are so many things in my spiritual life that I get discouraged about.
 - For example, I want to be share Christ with people... Recently, I failed at an opp. So I get discouraged... how am I ever going to change that? And then I think on this verse. God has already pre-appointed victory for me in this area. That good work and the power to do it has already been appointed for me. Each day I get up I know He has laid out successful encounters for that day and He has promised the power to accomplish them well, and I just have to get out of bed and go discover the things God has laid out for me that day!

¹ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, [Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1978, orig. 1666], pp. 90-91)

- Sometimes I think about my dreams for this church: **bless the 5 areas of our city (homeless; orphan; prisoners; unwed mothers; dropouts); plant 1000 churches.** God has already pre-appointed our success in them! That's why he put the dream in us. We just have to go discover what he has already prepared for us.
- Some of you have desires to grow and change your life. You want to be more disciplined; a better father. You want to be more generous. You want to pray more consistently. God has "pre-ordained" that you should walk in good works.

You say, "But I feel so dirty and weak."

- Put the whole chapter together. You and I are people made completely alive, but we still live in a body of death. That means that we are simultaneously more wicked and dead and depraved than we probably ever realized, and yet more accepted and alive in Christ and have more power flowing in us than we could ever have dreamed. You've got a spirit of resurrection life clothed in a body of depraved death.
- So, Paul tells us in Romans 6, we have to reckon ourselves as dead to sin... and alive to Christ. That means you believe the Gospel. My sinful body has been killed in Christ and my spirit is now alive in Jesus.
- Here's the secret: When you do that, when you believe that God has recreated you in Christ, God releases that resurrection power inside of you to live victoriously.
- The way to begin to live like God wants you to live as a Christian is not to buckle down and try harder and work up self-discipline; memorize verses; accountability group (those are all good); it is to believe what God has remade you in Christ and thereby release His resurrection power inside of you!

Bow heads... ***Have you ever received Christ?*** Sit down right now in what He's done for you. "Christ I believe it, and I receive it." **The**

others of you, worship God for His grace and think about the power God has made available to you and is at work inside of you.

Bullpen:

Dead fish

Which means that as the religious leader here (and this is not rhetoric, it is true) I have the temptations to be worse than everybody else since I have more religious knowledge than everybody else. I have the greatest tendency toward arrogance and pride.

(5) Vs. 4 is like the Continental Divide... the line that runs through the Rocky Mountains... a drop of rain falls one inch west of the divide then it goes all the way to the Pacific Ocean, and one inch to the east the water goes all the way to the Atlantic

, any more than I could make a dead tree alive by hanging pieces of fruit on it.

- If God has changed you, your behavior changes. If you still love bad deeds, there's no way could be changed.
- If you don't desire to serve God and know Him... you don't fix that by starting to do those things
- You have to come to God and receive His free love for you, taste it, believe it, say to Him, "Make me alive!" and be born again by God's Spirit... and that will change your heart so that you begin to love those things!

1 John 4:19 says we will love Him when we realized how much He first loved us.