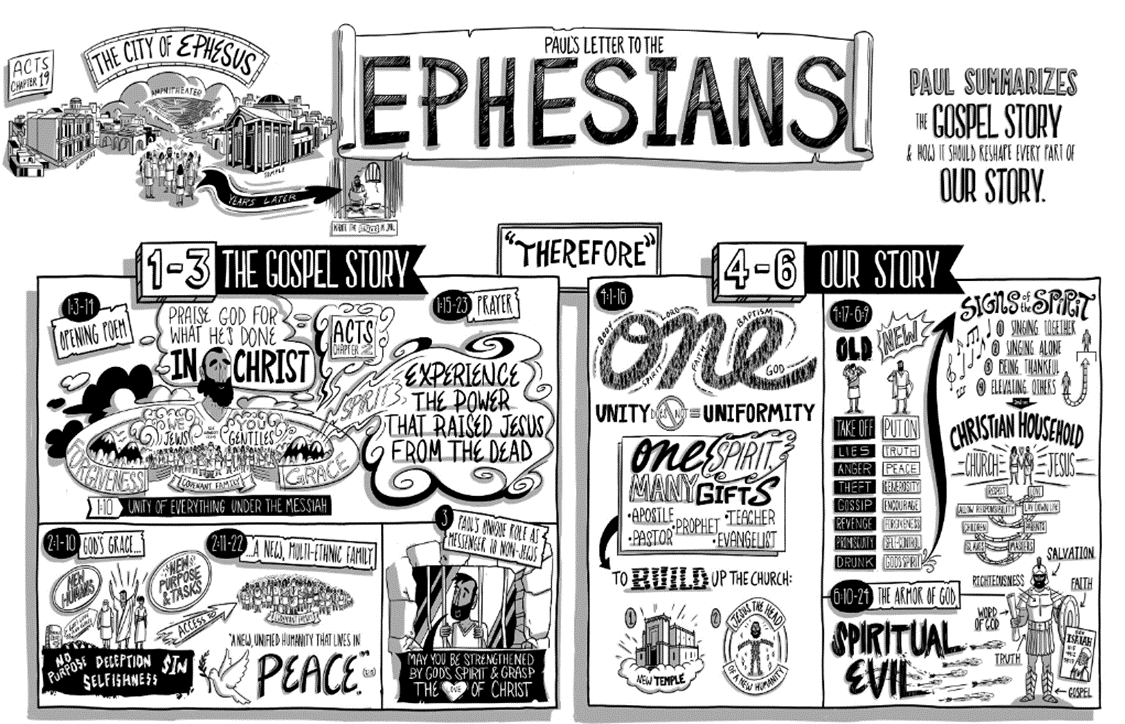
***One New Humanity: By Grace Through Faith***

**Message #4, Ephesians 2:1-22 September 27, 2020**

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**How the dead live**

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed  
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. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh   
and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because   
of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9not by works, so   
that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which   
God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2:1-10

1) By grace, through faith, for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) Location matters: from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Sticks and stones . . . .**

*11Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done by the hands of men) . . . .*

Ephesians 2:11

1) Key question: Who gets to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) Not so subtle warning: Watch out for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**And what we are: one new humanity (with access, see Keller’s sermon!!)**

*. . . remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

*14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:12-18

1) Location still matters: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) The new humanity can never forget its story: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3) Access means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

And one very contemporary issue: 4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ humanity is still radical!

**Pictures of God’s new people**

Buillding our theological vocabulary:

stranger = *zenos*, “stranger, different, other” as in zenophobia

house = *oikos*, primary root for “home,” both in terms of family home and structure

household = *oikeios*, refers to the members and structure of the extended household

alien = *para + oikos*, “those alongside of the permanent residents”

fellow citizens = *sum + politēs*, refers to the shared life of the “polis”

built upon = *epi + oikos + domeō*, refers to completion/permanence of the “roof on top”

cornerstone = *akro + gonia*, the top or key “angle” in an arch, both figurative an literal

being joined together = *sum + armos + logeō*, borrows from imagery of joining in marriage

being built together = *sum + oikos + domeō*, refers to the shared experience of being “built”

dwelling = *kata + oikos + tērion*, the “placeness” of the life of the household

1) “Together” Citizens

*19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people.*

Ephesians 2:19

This means: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) The extended family

*. . . and also members of his household* . . . .

Ephesians 2:20

This means: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3) A temple

*. . . built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:20-22

This means: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**My working outline of Ephesians**

Overall Theme:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Chapters 1-3 | | The Glory of God in the Church | |
| Chapter 1 | | The glory of God in redemption | |
| Chapter 2 | | The glory of God in reconciliation | |
| Chapter 3 | | The glory of God in the revelation of the mystery of the church | |
| Chapters 4-6 | | The Glory and Pleasure of God through the Church | |
| Chapter 4 | | The glory of God in the unity and growth of the church | |
| Chapter 5 | | The glory of God in the imitation of Christ by the saints | |
| Chapter 6 | | The glory of God in victory of Christ | |

**Resources for further studies of Ephesians**

For studying Ephesians 2:  
Horatio Bonar’s short study at [*https://www.monergism.com/without-god*](https://www.monergism.com/without-god)  
Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/8-guilt-men-and-grace-god-part-1-ephesians-21-10*](https://bible.org/seriespage/8-guilt-men-and-grace-god-part-1-ephesians-21-10)Kim Riddlebarger at [*https://www.monergism.com/immeasurable-riches-his-grace*](https://www.monergism.com/immeasurable-riches-his-grace)The classic Tim Keller at [*https://www.monergism.com/christ-our-house-%E2%80%93-ephesians-214-22*](https://www.monergism.com/christ-our-house-%E2%80%93-ephesians-214-22)  
Rabbi Loren Jacob’s message at [*https://www.shema.com/erev-yom-kippur-psalm-32-8588/*](https://www.shema.com/erev-yom-kippur-psalm-32-8588/)

This is a wonderful Bible Project introduction on youtube: [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\_continue=12&v=Y71r-T98E2Q&feature=emb\_logo*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=12&v=Y71r-T98E2Q&feature=emb_logo)

Bob Deffinbaugh’s Ephesians series is at [*https://bible.org/series/ephesians-glory-god-church*](https://bible.org/series/ephesians-glory-god-church)

Spurgeon’s series of messages on Ephesians are at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_eph.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_eph.htm)

Kim Riddlebarger’s sermons on Ephesians are at [*http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/sermons-on-ephesians/;jsessionid=3799445CA50CA06F2F395D4FBE89D586.v5-web017*](http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/sermons-on-ephesians/;jsessionid=3799445CA50CA06F2F395D4FBE89D586.v5-web017)

ThirdMill has produced “Paul and the Ephesians” at [*https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/19/version/*](https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/19/version/)

Desiring God, John Piper’s media ministry, has some wonderful resources at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/ephesians/1/messages*](https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/ephesians/1/messages)

Mark Johnston’s “Preaching Ephesians” at [*https://www.reformation21.org/articles/preaching-ephesians.php*](https://www.reformation21.org/articles/preaching-ephesians.php)

Doug’s favorite commentaries are John R. W. Stott’s *The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979), William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Baker Book House, 1967); Ephesians in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981) by A. Skevington Wood; and, much shorter, F. F. Bruce’s *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Revell, 1961).

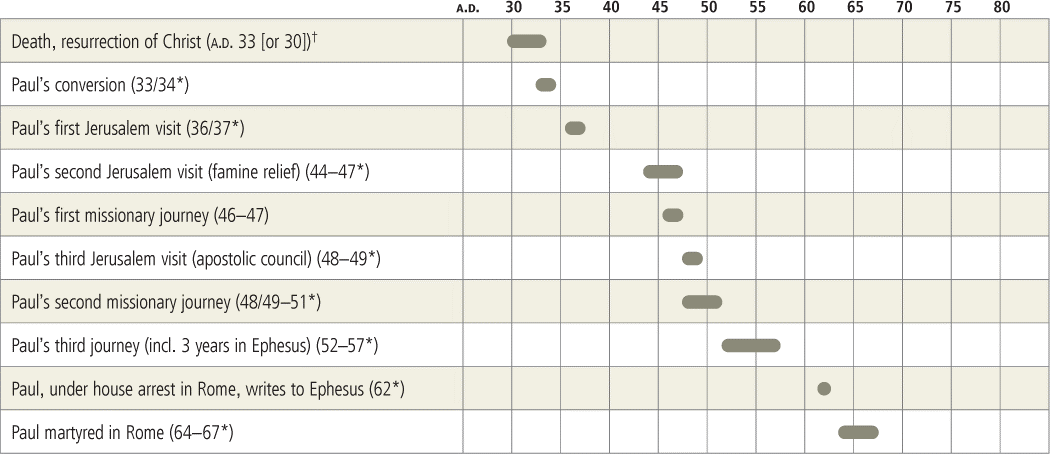
Martyn Lloyd-Jones has a wonderful seven volume series on Ephesians (Baker Books, 1978).

The text we spent the most time on in Darrell Johnson’s class was Timothy Gombis’ *The Drama of Ephesians* (IVP Academic, 2010)

The Gospel Coalition has resources on Ephesians at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/ephesians/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/ephesians/%20)

Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Ephesians 1 is at [*https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/ephesians-1.html*](https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/ephesians-1.html)

F.F. Bruce’s paraphrase is available at [*https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1962-3\_163.pdf*](https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1962-3_163.pdf)



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**Christ of our House – Ephesians 2:14-22**

by Dr. Timothy J. Keller

**Preached in Manhattan, NY on September 10, 1989**

*14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

*19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:14–22

We’re looking, for three weeks, at this passage about the church. Last week, we talked about the fact that the Spirit of God, the life of God, coming into our lives as believers creates a tie stronger than any other tie that can exist between human beings. It’s a tie that transcends the deepest differences that can exist between human beings, differences of family, differences of race, differences of culture, differences of class; therefore, we say the church has a unity and a fellowship, a solidarity the world has been seeking between human beings, for years, in vain.

Tonight, we’re going to look how the same principle relates to our worship. Last week, fellowship and unity; this week, worship. There are volumes in one verse here, verse 18. In fact, all we’re going to look at is verse 18. *“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”* Every word in there is loaded. It reminds me, a hymn writer once talked about a verse like that.

A box where sweets compacted lie.

That’s what it is. Every word is sweet. Look at the first one: *for*. It’s a sweet word. Why? Look at what comes before it, all of Paul’s discussion of how Jesus Christ died on the cross to reconcile people to God and to reconcile people to one another, but what is the point of it? What is it *for*? It all boils down to verse 18. *“For through him we both have access …” Access* is the bottom line of the Christian life. Access.

You may be religious. You may have experienced forgiveness. You may have experienced changes in your life. You may have overcome habits. You may have experienced a certain amount of peace, but listen. All those things are great, but that’s not the bottom line of the Christian life. Those things are symptoms. Those things are sparks, in a sense. They’re results. The bottom line of the Christian life is *access*. It’s all for this: Through him, we have access, getting in. *Getting in*.

The bottom line of the Christian life is … *Are you in, near God?* Are you out on the periphery, or are you in close? Do you experience access to him? Do you enjoy him? Do you *know* him? Or flip it around. Is he in the center of your life, or is he out on the periphery? Does he enjoy access to you? Do you enjoy access to him, and does he have absolute access to you? Are you in his center, or is he in your center? *Access*, that’s what the Christian life is about. That’s why we have to look at it. Notice all three members of the Trinity, the triune God, are involved in bringing us this great gift.

For what? “For through him …” Who’s that? Christ. “.… we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.” Three prepositions: *through Christ*, *to the Father*, *by the Spirit.* Three little words. Prepositions of all things, not a noun, not a verb, not even an adverb. Three prepositions on which you can build your whole life. Not only that (and it has been done), on which you can build a whole civilization. Three prepositions. Let’s look at each one of them. This gift of access is *to* the Father *through* the Son *by* the Spirit. Let’s look at what this gift of access is. It’s:

**1. To the Father**

This word *access*, it’s one of those few times in which it’s helpful to know Greek. Usually, the Greek word means exactly what the translation says it means. In this case, it’s helpful to look at it, because the word *access* here, in Greek literature, means to have an introduction to a VIP, to have an introduction to a very important person. Therefore, Paul is, in a very specific way, drawing a picture.

Imagine this. Modernize it a little bit. There’s some great man coming to town, a man of the greatest importance, the greatest significance, the greatest fame, and in this case (which isn’t often the case), you admire this man mightily, so much that you’re willing to go out into the crowd just hoping you’ll catch a glimpse of him. Maybe you’ve even pushed to the front of the police line. You’re waiting there, and along comes the entourage. You haven’t even seen *the man* yet.

All of a sudden, to your surprise, in the entourage, you recognize somebody. Somebody in his entourage comes over and says, “Oh, I can’t believe you’re here. This is marvelous. Would you like to meet him?” You say, “I can’t believe it. Why, yes.” You’re on the outside. You’re behind the police line. You’re outside just hoping for a glimpse through the door, through the window. Maybe when the limousine comes by, for some strange reason, (you know, if there’s a light on the other side, even those dark glass places you can sometimes see through), maybe just a silhouette.

Suddenly, the friend takes you and leads you in, not just inside the police line but inside the house, not just inside the house but inside the room, not just inside the room but right up to his chair. You sit down, and the man gets the introduction from your friend. He turns to you, and he says, “Why, this is marvelous. I’d love to get to know you better. Could you come back for dinner? Just you and me and my wife.” You’re in. You’re in. You’ve experienced access.

Is that far-fetched? Let me tell you something, friends. If you think that’s far-fetched, the reality Paul is pointing to is as far greater than that story as an ocean is greater than a dewdrop. The reality is far greater than that story, which many of you say, “That’s never happened to me. That sort of thing never will happen to me.” The reality is greater, and that is every person who has received Jesus Christ as Savior has an introduction, not to a VIP, not to somebody in a limo. In New York, they’re a dime a dozen.

There are a lot of others places … *a limo* … anybody in a limo, anybody in an entourage, anybody behind a police line, that might happen once a year, twice a year, but here, it’s every day. It’s every block. But you say, “Even so, it’s fantastic. That would never happen.” The reality is so far greater because you have an introduction, an irrevocable, permanent introduction, into the courts of the King of the cosmos, the Lord of all life and love and power. He takes you *into* his heart, *into* his secrets, *into* his counsel, *into* his confidence. You, you’re in.

This is important because whether we recognize it or not, many of us, to one degree or another, are really dominated and influenced by a deep need to be on the inside, and our lives are actually run as much by that as they are by a fear of being left out. There is no worse fear than being left out. See, human society is full of little, what we call *inner circles*. There are all sorts of inner circles, and the worst thing in the world is to be outside of one if you get near one.

The most famous inner circle, of course, is high society, and a lot of us want to be in high-society circles. Well, we don’t admit that to ourselves until we get near enough to one to get an introduction, and then we go wild over it if it happens to us. Of course, we consider them snobs. Who is *we*? Anyone outside of that circle. But listen, those of us who are the most disdainful of people who are social climbers trying to get into the inner circle, many of us are just as consumed by a need to be in some other inner circle.

Oh, no, we don’t want tall ceilings and chandeliers. We want the cozy little studio or attic, and just four or five friends and the delicious knowledge we, even we, just we four or five, are the ones who *know*. Know what? It depends. It depends on if you’re Republican or a Democrat. It depends. But there are all these inner circles, and we want to be in there. Now before any of you say, “Oh, I’m not dominated by that kind of thing. I’m not influenced by that kind of thing,” realize, think about it. We are. It’s one of the great mainsprings of human behavior.

Why … I’m going to say *kids*, but you know, lots of us were, those of us who weren’t hatched … why is it that most kids have sex the first time? Why is it that most kids use drugs the first time? Why do they have sex the first time? Is it their hormones? Ridiculous. Those of you who remember realize you’re too scared to have your hormones involved at all. It’s the desire to be *in.* It’s the fear of being out. It’s one of the mainsprings of our professional lives. Let’s face it. It’s one of the reasons we get galled if we’re not brought in, and it’s any profession. It’s my profession too.

Kathy and I know that there’s a particular friend of ours, a pastor friend, who has gotten up and up in the world. Over the years, he’s really developed an inner circle. I’ve never been invited in, and there have been many times in which I was rankled by that. It’s the same cancer. When you start a new church, one of the things that very often happens is in the early stages there is tension between the people who perceive they have not gotten into the pastor’s inner circle and the people who are in. On and on it goes.

I read a very interesting biography not too long ago. It was a testimony of a man who had been gloriously converted to Jesus Christ after a long career as a very highly successful female impersonator. You know, I was just reading through the thing rather quickly. It was rather light reading and interesting and helpful and very glorious in many ways. At one point, he’s telling how, after all his life being a sissy, marginalized, always on the outside, always mocked, the first time he got onto the stage and went into his act … This is what he wrote: “I went into my act. They demanded encore after encore. I was *in* for once in my life, all those normal people out there clapping.”

The power that lifestyle had for him was that need to be *in*. You can go into psychoanalyzing him. You can go into checking out his hormones, but the whole idea was … *He was out, and now he was in.* It does affect us. How can we keep from this sort of thing ruining our lives? There’s only one way. You can sniff and say, “I won’t let that happen,” but then you look around for other people like you who are just as sensible about these inner circles. The next thing you know, you have one.

You have to acknowledge the fact that this is a need for access, and the only way it will not run your life and ruin your life is if you fill that need with the only thing that can truly satisfy it, and that is access into the only circle that counts, the circle of God, the Trinity. He takes you all the way in. It says in the Psalms, *“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him …” The secret*. That’s a big part of being in an inner circle, when people tell you secrets, you know, and the Lord tells you secrets.

It says in Revelation 2, to those who overcome, he gives you a white stone, and on it is your name written, the name that is known only to you. If you think I’m so wise, as a teacher of the Bible, that I know what in the world he’s talking about, I don’t know. But all I know is it probably has to do with the fact that God, the longer you work with him, the more he shows you who you are, the more he shows you what gifts he has given you, what your purpose is. He brings you *in*. He brings you all the way in; therefore, the only thing that is going to satisfy the need for access is access to God.

What is that access? It’s *knowing* God. See, the word for *access* and the word for *knowing God* is the same. *Knowing God* is the essence. John 17:3, Jesus says an amazing thing. He says, “This is eternal life …” What’s *eternal life*? Is that kind of esoteric to you? “This is eternal life that they know you, the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Knowing God is eternal life. What *knowing God* means is very critical to understand, and the best way I can explain it is to tell you the word *knowledge* in the Bible always has two layers to it. *Two layers*.

You can know something at the informational level, but you also can know something at the personal level, and those two things are intertwined. In John 14:9, Jesus says to Philip, “Philip, have you been with me so long and still you do not know me?” What does he mean? He says, “Philip, you have a lot of information about me. You’ve been living with me. You know all about me. You’ve heard all of my words. You’ve memorized all of my teachings, but you still don’t get it.”

What is he talking about? Philip had an informational knowledge, but no more. He was missing something else. Or in Matthew 7 (this is a sermon in itself, but I’ll do it some other time), where Jesus says on the last day people will come to him and they will say, “Lord, Lord, didn’t we do great deeds in your name? Didn’t we cast out demons in your name? Didn’t we prophesy in your name?” And Jesus will look at them and say, “I never knew you …” *I never knew you.*

Don’t ask me to go into that now, but what he’s saying is this is the all-knowing Creator who is talking. Jesus cannot mean, “I don’t know *about* you.” It doesn’t mean, “I don’t have all the information on you.” He knows everything about you. He knows the number of hairs on your head, but “I never knew you …” He is talking about personal knowledge. Put it this way: You can know something at an informational level and not personal.

My brother-in-law, I remember, some years ago, hated to wear seatbelts. I used to joke about it. He would say, “I hate seatbelts!” One time I visited him (he lives far away) and he had his seatbelt on. I said, “Ooh, wow.” I joked around in a macho way. You know, guys do. I said, “Hey, what are you doing with the seatbelt on?” He was very serious. He said, “I went to visit a friend of mine in the hospital who was in a fairly minor accident and went through the windshield. He did not have his seatbelt on and had 30 stitches in his face.” He said, “Ever since then, I put on my seatbelt.”

Think about something. Did my brother-in-law, whose name is Jim … Did Jim get any new information about seatbelts? Did he get any *new* information? He already knew all the stuff about seatbelts. He knew the statistics. Did he get any new information? No. Then what made the difference? The difference was, though he did not get any new information … listen … the information became new. *He got no new information; the information became new*.

It moved down from the informational level to the personal level. In other words, it got down to the place where it affected him as a whole person. His mind, his will, and his emotions were engaged. He saw how he related to seatbelts as a person (personally), and now it changed him. In the same way, it’s possible to have a whole lot of principles, knowledge about the Lord, knowledge about scriptural teaching, knowledge about God, but the questions is … *Has that knowledge ever come down and become personal?* Have you ever actually *met* him?

The Bible talks about this in Ephesians 1:18, where Paul says, “I pray …” He says this to the Ephesians. “… that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened so you might know the hope of your calling.” To me, that’s a *locus classicus*. That’s a classic text. He tells these people he’s praying they would know the hope of their calling. These are Christians. They know about their calling. They’ve heard it all, and he’s saying, “But you don’t really *know* it, do you? At the deep level, at the personal level, you haven’t really encountered it, and I’m praying the eyes of your heart would be enlightened.”

Right there, you have it. I can read something in the Scripture, but when the truth begins to shine because of what God’s doing to me, truth that has always been there, truth that has been a letter on the page … it begins to shine … the eyes of my heart are enlightened. I begin to *know* that truth. There are places where the Bible says, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” Now there it is.

A lot of you in this room (I would hope most of you, probably) believe in the goodness of God. You believe God is good. You know he is good, but is that truth *shining* at you? Are you experiencing *access* to the goodness of God? Is it thrilling you? Is it comforting you? Is it changing you? Is it personal knowledge the way it became to my brother-in-law, Jim? Is it affecting you?

When I was a pastor, people would come on in, and I would see they were eaten up with worry, eaten up with it. This was back in the days when I was fairly naïve about this. I would open the Bible, and I would read places where it talked about God being good. “Oh, there are so many places about God being good, and worry is a complete mistrust, a throwing out the window, of the whole idea of the goodness of God. You can’t worry without denying it,” and I would say, “You know God is good.” The people would look at me, and they would say, “I know that, but it doesn’t help.”

I began to realize, as I began to read what the Bible said about knowledge, what it meant to know God, what it meant to have *access*, I realized you can’t say that. If you say, “I know about the goodness of God, but it doesn’t help,” you’re contradicting yourself. If you know about the goodness of God, you wouldn’t be worried. If you really knew it … I’m not saying that Christians don’t worry, but it’s because of a lack of access.

If the truth begins to *shine*, if the eyes of your heart are enlightened, if you know it, if you experience *access* to the goodness of God, it wipes out that kind of anxiety. Nobody has perfect access, but to the degree you have access, to that degree, there’s peace. The truth shines. That’s what this great gift is. It’s a remarkable gift. It’s unbelievable. Do you see it? Just before I go on, real quickly, there are two opposite errors churches fall into about this idea of knowledge.

There’s *informational knowledge*, and there’s *personal, experiential knowledge*. There are some churches that put all the emphasis on informational, and the emphasis is all on learning the doctrine and understanding it and knowing it inside out and mastering it and being accurate but without a commensurate emphasis on working that truth into the life before God in repentance and prayer so the truth shines and changes you. If you don’t have that commensurate access, if you put too much emphasis on the informational knowledge, what happens is you develop a legalistic church, an authoritarian church, a heresy-hunting church.

On the other hand, if a church puts much more emphasis on experience, and actually even eschews dogma, always saying, “We don’t believe in doctrine and dogma. We just want to bring you to Jesus,” the danger with that, first of all, that’s silly because as soon as you say, “I don’t believe in doctrine, just Jesus,” I say, “Who is Jesus?” “Oh, Son of God, fully God, fully Man, Savior, Mediator. But I don’t believe in doctrine.” You can’t. You can’t have personal knowledge without informational knowledge. Real knowledge, real access is based on informational knowledge. It’s more than informational knowledge, but it’s never less.

I mean, that’s not the way it works. If you sit down with somebody and you’re trying to get to know them personally, you ask for information. You want to know where they are, where they live, what job they have, and so on, don’t you? Then of course, you use the informational knowledge to build personal knowledge, and that’s the way it goes. But it’s more dangerous than that.

You have to realize that Christian mysticism (if I can use the word), Christian experience, is utterly different than Eastern experience. Eastern mysticism puts all the emphasis on destroying, frustrating the one side of your brain, the analysis side, the rational side, the logical side, and says, “Let’s frustrate it.” You know, all the things you’re supposed to meditate on, like, *What is the sound of one hand clapping?* And so forth. You’re supposed to meditate on that because it frustrates the logic. It frustrates the one side of your brain until the intuitive side is brought out.

That’s absolutely unbiblical, because Jesus said to the woman at the well of Samaria, “You must worship in spirit and truth, with your left and your right brain, with your analysis and your intuition.” I can’t go into more detail on that now, but do you see why there are these opposite errors? Knowledge is always more than information but never less. This is the gift. We have access, but how do we get it? How do we get it? There are the last two prepositions, which we actually have to look at together.

Why is it that most of us do not experience that access very much? And why is that some of you have never experienced? You know it as I’m describing it. Okay. There is the gift *to* the Father. That’s the gift, but the gift comes *through* the Son and *by* the Spirit. In other words, the gift is *bought* by the Son and delivered *by* the Spirit.

**2. Bought by the Son**

It says what? It says, “For through him we both have access to the Father …” Go back to the illustration about the entourage. Remember the key? Why is it that you got in to see *the man*? It was the friend, and that friend just can’t be any friend. You don’t think just anybody in their entourage could have gotten you in. It had to be a friend with tremendous standing with the VIP, with the very important person, right? It had to be a person with great standing. Why? Because a great person who doesn’t know you has to trust the introducer, so then he knows he can trust you.

If you try to introduce yourself, that’s tremendously arrogant, because what you’re doing if you try to introduce yourself, is you’re actually granting this person an audience. It’s tremendously arrogant. You say, “I’ll tell you who I am, and I don’t need an introduction,” which, of course, is just setting yourself up over top that person. The only way to get in is to have an introduction by somebody whom the great person trusts. It’s the only way.

Who is Jesus Christ? We’re told, “He is the One who stands before the Father.” Right here in this same passage, up in verse 13, we’re told we’re brought nigh. “We’re brought nigh by his blood.” He died in our place. He took our punishment for our sins. “Now,” the Bible says, “he stands before the Father.” Hebrews 7:25: “He stands. He lives to intercede for us.” We read a little earlier in the service he stands as one making our defense. In other words, we have a permanent, irrevocable introduction.

Anyone who approaches God through Jesus has *access*, and only through Jesus. Because if you go any other way, you try any other religion, you’ll have to be introducing yourself. You are your own reference. Do you realize how arrogant that is? To come to someone who you’re trying to get a job from, or you’re trying to get in with, you’re trying to get an audience from, and you refuse to even come up with a reference. No one else introduces you … *I introduce myself*.

Do you realize how incredibly insulting that is to the other person? Do you realize why you’ll never get a job that way? Just try to go see the president of the United States without an introduction. You’ll come down with bullets in you. It’s the same thing with the Father. You have two choices. There are only two approaches. You can *introduce yourself*, or you can *go through Jesus*. When you go through Jesus, you don’t have to introduce yourself ever again. *Ever again*. Then we’re told …

**3. By the Spirit**

What that means is though the Son has *bought* it, the Spirit has actually *brought* it. The Son has *bought* it, and the Spirit has *brought* it. It says, for example, in John 16, Jesus says, “The Spirit will come and take of mine and show me to you. He will glorify me.” The Spirit’s job is to melt you under the truth.

Back in the old days, before we had wonderful glued envelopes, do you know how you sealed an envelope if you wrote it? What you had to have is you had to have a little piece of wax, right? You had to have a seal (usually a signet ring), and you had to have a flame. So you softened the wax with the flame, and what the flame did to the wax was it made the wax susceptible to the seal.

If you tried to put the seal on the wax without the flame, there are only two things that could happen. What? It could break the wax, or it could just leave only a superficial outline on the surface. But if the wax is changed, it’s softened by the flame, then the wax is susceptible, and it’s changed in the image of the seal. Now that illustration, transform it. The *wax* is your heart. The *seal* is the Truth, the Word of God, and the *flame* is the Spirit.

When I go to the Truth of God, and the Spirit is giving me access, do you see what happens? You can read about the power of God. If you just read about the power of God, without the influence of Spirit, you say, “Oh, God is powerful.” Without the influence of the Spirit, all that can do is make a superficial impression on the top of you, but when the Spirit of God is there, you read about the power, and there’s access. The truth begins to shine. It begins to change you, and what happens is your heart develops courage.

When you read about his goodness, it develops peace in you. When you read about his forgiveness, it develops relief in you. You shake off your guilty fears. When you read about his forgiveness, it develops generosity and mercy in you. When you read about his holiness, it develops conviction of sin and humility in you. Don’t you see? Only when the Spirit of God is doing that do you see real access happening. Only then.

I told you, by looking at these two things, these two prepositions, *through Christ* and *by the Spirit*, we can understand why some of us in this room are not experiencing access. Do you know why? A lot of us are saying, “I’ve been trying to do a good job. I’ve been working at being religious. I’ve been coming to church for a number of years. I’ve never had anything like what you’re talking about. Never!”

The answer is there’s no influence of the Spirit. There’s no softening. In fact, I’d have to say you have to be careful because the more and the more you try so hard to be religious and to be moral without the influence of Spirit on you, you push that seal in the wax, and you push that seal in the wax; all you get is a superficial outline. Eventually what happens is you crack it. That’s why we have people running around forming Fundamentalists Anonymous groups, people who have been cracked under the legalism, cracked under the Word without the Spirit.

Oh, you say, “Well, okay, why isn’t the influence of the Spirit in my life?” The only answer could be you’re not coming through the Son. It’s the only possible answer. You might say, “Well, I believe in Jesus,” but are you trying to introduce yourself? Are you coming to God, making yourself your own reference? Are you coming to him and saying, “Father, I’ve had a hard life, so I deserve …” I mean maybe you don’t use the words, but, “I’ve had it tough. I’ve tried. I’ve worked. I’ve worked.”

Or are you saying instead, “Oh, Lord God. Oh, Lord God. The audacity of someone like me to come to you, you have the right just to throw me out, but the gospel is Jesus has paid it all, and now he stands before the throne for me. He is my introduction. He is my reference. No other. All the other things I’ve ever done are worthless in your sight. Save me for Jesus’ sake?” If you’ve never done that, you’ve never come through him.

Do you understand that? For as hard as you’ve tried to be a Christian, if you’ve never done that, if you’ve never stopped your introductions, you never come through him; therefore, you’ve never really had access to the Father by the Spirit. Where does this leave us? Let me just finish by applying what we’ve learned, access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, to three kinds of people here. Ready? If the shoe fits …

**1. There are those of you who know about this access because you’ve experienced it, but you don’t experience it that much**

You know, some tests of the experience … quick … just to make sure you know you’re alive. When you have access, when the Spirit is working on you, when the truth is shining, number one, when you go to God in prayer, *you feel the burdens come off*. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” You feel the burdens come off. You can feel the needs and the troubles come off when you’re praying.

Another mark of access is *there’s a confidence and boldness*. Instead of saying, “Oh, gosh, why would God even listen to me?” there’s a boldness. There’s an eloquence. Besides the confidence and besides the sense of burdens coming off, number three, the real mark of access is *surprise*. There’s that hymn writer who wrote …

Sometimes a light surprises // The Christian while he sings;

It is the Lord who rises // With healing in His wings.

When you’re looking at the Word of God and it begins to sparkle out truth, your mind gets eloquent. That’s access. You start to see new beauties you hadn’t seen before, things that surprise you. They sparkle out like sun on the water. Your mind gets eloquent. You’re surprised by new beauties.

Another mark of access, and the most important one, is *you find it really changes the way in which you live*. Do you know that access? Do you know what I’m talking about? Every real Christian knows about it, but I also know every real Christian in this room also says, “I wish I had more of it. In fact, I’m really missing it lately. What can you do?” Here’s what I tell you to do: Even *you* need to make sure you’re going through the Son by the Spirit.

*Through the Son* means … *Do you rejoice in the access you have through the Son?* Do you rejoice in it, or do you run right into God’s presence with your “gimme” prayer list, and you say, “Oh, Lord, I have a lot for you to work on today?” Or do you walk in recollecting, thinking about the fact the only reason you’re not struck dead as you walk into prayer is because you’re coming through the Son and to say, “Oh, Lord, look at the standing I have. Even you can’t bring a charge against me because of the great salvation you brought for me in Jesus Christ?”

To the degree you rejoice in that access, to the degree you’ll experience that access, do you see? Do you just run into God’s presence, or do you enjoy? Do you reflect on what you have? The Bible says, again and again, you must pray in Jesus’ name. Do you know what that means? Do you think it’s just a little thing you say at the end in perfunctory way? To come in the name of Jesus means you know the only reason God will hear you is because of the irrevocable, permanent introduction you have before the throne of God. You relish that, and you revel in that. Are you doing that?

The other thing, of course, is you have to be by the Spirit, and one of the reasons many of us are not experiencing access is not only are we asking the Spirit for that access and yearning for it, a lot of us are grieving the Spirit in our lives. If access to God is by the Spirit and yet in our lives, by sins of omission or commission, by a lack of Christian duties or by actually breaking God’s commandments, you grieve the Spirit, and then you wonder why there’s no access. You can’t do that.

My friends, don’t be too discouraged here. You have to realize sometimes God doesn’t give you high access, and it’s a way for him to test you, because God values obedience given when there’s very little feeling in the heart. When you don’t feel close to him, but you obey, he knows how hard that is, and he knows how valuable that is, and he likes it. But on the other hand, I must point out to you God wants us to have access, and the reason many of us don’t is simply because of our disobedience and our laziness. You have to recollect coming through Jesus. You have to go *by* the Spirit.

**2. The people who are trying to start a new church here**

Not all of you are. An alive church experiences access to the Father. That means an alive church is just as big on defending the faith and truth as spreading it. An alive church is not afraid of surprise, because *access* means surprise. An alive church isn’t afraid of surprise. I mean, it’s creative. It’s not rigid. An alive church is a church that is ready to expect great possibilities because they have access to God, but I can’t go into that right now.

**3. There are those of you who are here who have never experienced access, and you know it**

In New York City it’s possible to be in some mighty elite circles. I don’t care what kind of circle you’re in, if you’re just getting in or if you think you’re about to get in, it’s awfully exciting, isn’t it? You’re *sure* this is going to satisfy that need for access. Nuh-uh. No matter what circle you’re in (and if you’ve been in it long enough, you know this), you’re nowhere unless you’re in God’s circle. The only way to do that is to come to the Father through Son by the Spirit.

Psalm 84 says, “How lovely is your dwelling place … My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” Everybody in this room, whether you admit it or not, that is the language of your deepest self, and the door is open. Let’s go in. Let’s take time to pray silently, time to say, “Lord, here’s what I have to do to put into practice what I’ve learned tonight.” Let’s pray.

If you’re a believer who is really dry, come through the Son. Remind yourself of who is there for you. Stop trying to introduce yourself. Don’t worry about that. At the same time, be willing to quit with those things you know grieve the Spirit and have blocked off your access. If there’s anybody here who knows you have no access; you really need to receive Christ as Savior, pray this prayer with me:

*Lord, I’ve tried, off and on, to reach you, but I see how it has all been my own efforts, really, to introduce myself to you. I thought many things I did could get me in, but only Jesus Christ and his work can get me in. Now I receive him as Savior. Master, accept me for his sake. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.*

# The Immeasurable Riches of His Grace

### by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger

Texts: Ephesians 2:1-10; Isaiah 54:1-10

Ephesians 2:1-10 is one of those great passages of Scripture with which most Christians are well-familiar. This passage contains important and well-known proof-texts for the doctrine of sola gratia (grace alone), as well as for the doctrine of total depravity. Most of us have memorized Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Many are familiar with the opening verse of this chapter which reminds us that "we are dead in sin." Our familiarity with this chapter is both good and bad. We may already know the details of the passage–which is good. But the downside is that we must not concentrate upon the well-known proof-texts to the exclusion of the other important points Paul is making. As we make our way through Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians we need to understand this passage as part of a larger discussion. In this section of Ephesians (chapters 1-3), Paul sets out his overall purpose in writing–to remind believers of our glorious inheritance in Jesus Christ so that we understand our role in God's new society, which is the church of Jesus Christ. This, in turn, becomes the basis for the applicatory section of the letter, in chapters 3-6. A proper understanding of how God saves us from our sins, is the only proper basis for living the Christian life.

As we continue our series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we make our way into the second chapter as Paul continues to describe how it is that God saves us from our sins, and how we as Christians are to understand the course of human history (in general) and our place in that history in particular. In verses 3-14, Paul has already given us a Trinitarian panorama of redemptive history. Paul's "big picture" (as we have been speaking of it) begins in eternity past when the Father chose a vast multitude of those whom he would redeem from their sins in the person of his Son. Paul moves on to recount that the Father sent his beloved son to die for all of those whom the Father had chosen. It was the shed blood of Jesus which redeems and secures the forgiveness of our sins for those given him by the Father. And then, Paul says, at a particular moment in time, the Holy Spirit called us to faith. We heard the word of truth, we were included in Christ, and we were then sealed until the day of redemption. Here we have the famous Reformed mantra–redemption decreed, accomplished, and applied. Paul has given us a redemptive historical panorama which takes us from eternity past to until that day when Jesus Christ returns to judge the world, raise the dead, and make all things new at the end of the age.

Whenever we look at the "big picture," we see the love of God in saving sinners who truly deserve his wrath. We also see that Jesus not only took to himself a true human nature, but he came to earth to suffer and die to secure redemption for those whom the Father had chosen. But when God raised Jesus from the dead and Jesus ascended on high to take his place at the Father's right hand, Paul says, it is clear that God has the power to do what he has promised. In the cross of Christ, we see God's love and justice. In the resurrection, we see God's power. In Christ's ascension, we see Christ's on-going rule over all of human history in his priestly, kingly, and prophetic offices. And this, Paul says, is the basis of our hope.

In verses 19-22 of chapter 1, Paul reminds us that in Jesus Christ, we see the "immeasurable greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church." The very fact that Jesus–who had died for us–has been raised for us, and is presently seated at the Father's right hand, means that Jesus is directing all things toward the end which God has ordained. This is how Paul views all of human history–serving the purposes of God in the redemption of his elect. This should also serve as the basis for a believer's hope that no matter what our circumstances are on earth–that which Christ has won for us can never be taken from us. We know this because he has risen from the dead and then ascended on high. Because of this, our inheritance is secure.

As we saw last time, Paul sees all of history as the unfolding of two successive ages, "this age" and "the age to come." Paul holds out no expectation for some sort of human utopia. Nor does Paul look for an earthly millennial kingdom either before or after Christ comes back. Paul is not a millennarian (either "pre" or "post). As used throughout the New Testament, "this age" is always a reference to our temporal fallen human existence, while "the age to come" is always a reference to things eternal (and redeemed humanity). Paul reminds us that Jesus rules over both time and eternity. He rules over both this age and the age to come. Furthermore, because Jesus has been raised from the dead, there is a profound sense in which the age to come has already broken in upon the present. When Jesus rose again, the new creation dawned and our future inheritance is guaranteed, based upon what Jesus has already accomplished for us. This is what we mean when we speak of the already (those blessings we presently have "in Christ") and the not yet (those blessings which are ours, but which we have not yet actually received–such as the resurrection of our bodies).

This is very important to keep in mind as we go through Ephesians chapter two, because one of the most important issues Paul addresses in our passage is the fact that even though we must live out our lives in the present evil age, Paul reminds us that God already sees us as raised with Christ and seated with him in heavenly places. Because of the already (chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, called and sealed by the Spirit), the blessings of the "not yet" (being raised from the dead and seated with Christ in the heavenlies) have already been secured for us by Jesus himself. This provides us with hope–no matter what happens in this life, our eternal inheritance is secure because of Jesus' victory over death and the grave. This tells us how we must understand the events (good as well as bad) which unfold every night on the evening news. God is working out his purposes as Jesus is directing all things (including the wrath of sinful humans) toward the end he has foreordained. This also means that Jesus (who was raised, and who has ascended into heaven) is ever present with us through his Holy Spirit. He speaks to us through his word, and Jesus continually ratifies his promise to save us from our sins through the sacraments.

With the connection established between Ephesians 2 and what has gone before, we now turn to our text, the familiar ten verses which open this chapter.

One of the first things we should notice about this section of Ephesians is Paul's use of "you" (most likely a reference to Gentiles) and "we all" in verse 3 (a reference to Jews, including Paul).1 All people, whether they be Jew or Gentile, must be delivered from the guilt and power of sin. Human sinfulness is the common lot of the entire human race. Those Jews who looked down upon the Gentiles and considered them unclean, calling them dogs, ought not get too haughty, because the same sinful condition so apparent in Gentile godlessness, plagues the Jewish heart as well as well as the Gentile's. Indeed, one of the striking things about Paul's theology is his realistic view of the human condition, and how the fall of Adam (our biological and federal head) affects the entire human race (Jew and Gentile).

Paul opens this chapter with a very blunt assessment of the human condition. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." Paul makes two very important points here. The first is that those reading/hearing his letter have already been raised to newness of life when they heard the word of truth and were included in Christ. When we came to faith in Christ, we did so knowing that we had been delivered from the universal human condition–sin, condemnation and death. But non-Christians don't believe (or understand) that such a condition even exists. They refuse to believe that such a thing characterizes them!

Paul's second point is that believers once walked in this condemnation (death and guilt), but no longer do so. The Father has chosen us, Jesus has died for us, the Spirit has called us. We have been rescued from our desperate condition into which we were born. This is what we mean when we speak of salvation (we are saved by God from his wrath) and "grace" (God was under no obligation to do any of this). Had God not taken the initiative to save us from our sins, we would inevitably remain in the sinful condition in which we were born, unable and unwilling to do anything about it.

Given the different ways in which Christians and non-Christians see the human condition, it is vital to understand how Paul's perspective on human nature greatly differs from so many of our contemporaries. The average American believes that people are basically good. In practical terms, this means that the bad things people do are an anomaly. Bad behavior is an exception to what people truly are inside (basically good). When people steal, commit crimes, fall victim to addictions, etc., this is an indication that some external force has pulled them away from the good person they truly are by nature. The bad action is in no sense a reflection upon human nature. If you believe that people are basically good, then you see sin as a self-willed violation of society's law and standards, or even a contradiction to your own personal code of ethics. If this is the case, then you will not see sinfulness as the basic human condition. Sins are actions you take, things you do. To be saved (on such a scheme) we must stop doing these bad things.

Paul, on the other hand, sees the human race as fallen. As the old Puritans put it, "in Adam's fall, sinned we all." The apostle contends that were are born in a sinful condition (which he calls "the flesh"), a condition which inevitably gives rise to particular sins. We sin because we are sinners. We sin because we like to sin, and we want to sin. Paul also believes that ours is a race in open rebellion against God. Therefore, we are completely unwilling to accept God's right to judge us for our wrong-doing. We do not believe God has the right to do with us as he wishes because he's given us freedom to do as we wish. We do not think it fair that God chooses to save some and not others. We think this way because we are unwilling to accept the fact that if God left us in our sinful condition, we could do nothing to save ourselves from that wrath which is to come on the day of judgment. This is what Reformed theologians speak of as "autonomy" (self-law). Because of sin, we are a law unto ourselves. Our beliefs about God, as well as our understanding of how he relates to us will have very little to do with what the Bible says, and most often stem from our own sinful foolishness, and ignorance about God and his grace.

Those who know that they are sinners by nature and by choice, and who find their only hope of heaven in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, will hear Paul's words and understand the gravity of that sinful condition from which they have been delivered. We don't see it as an insult when Paul tells us that we were dead in sins and trespasses and that God must act to save us, or else we would not be saved. This good news is a reminder of that from which we've been delivered. Having been included in Christ (because God chose us in love), we can see that from which we have been saved. Like Paul, our heart should swell with gratitude because we've been delivered from that mode of existence in which we used to live–enslaved by sin and unable and unwilling to do anything about it. Suffice to say, people born in sin can do nothing to save themselves from God's wrath and anger. They cannot correctly evaluate their situation, until God enables them to look into the mirror of his law where our sinfulness is revealed to us.

In the latter part of verse 2, Paul continues his discussion of sinful human nature and its consequences. Because we are "dead in sins" we can do absolutely nothing to save ourselves. We all followed "the course of this world," (literally, "this age") following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Paul sets up an interesting parallel between the "age of this world" and "the domain of the air." I take Paul to be describing how it is that in seeking autonomy (to be a law to oneself) we end-up unwittingly enslaved to that which is destined to perish (this age) as well as being unwittingly dominated by Satan (the ruler of the air), who keeps us in ignorance of the truth. We champion our freedom, but cannot see we are enslaved to our sin.

Paul's statement here is a rather strong parallel to his comments in 2 Corinthians 4:4. "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In fact, in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8, Paul makes the same basic point this way. "Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Paul's point is that Satan keeps us ignorant of the truth, a situation which sinful people actually prefer.

Whenever we discuss the role of the devil as the enemy of God's people, we must begin by erasing the images stuck in our heads from movies we've seen like The Exorcist or The Omen. The devil is the father of lies. Those who are enslaved by the ways of this present age have no eternal perspective on things. We eat, drink, and seek to be merry because tomorrow we die. This life and its joys and toils is all that there is. The work of Satan is not to possess teenage girls, make their heads spin around, and make them blaspheme at the sight of a crucifix. The work of Satan is to keep the people of this age bound to the ways of thinking and doing associated with this age–with no hope, no sense of the need for redemption, no hope in God's purposes being worked out in the midst of this fallen and sinful world. That is what Satan does, according to Paul.

While the Jews of Paul's day looked down upon the Gentiles as "unclean" because of their dietary habits and sexual immorality, Paul reminds his Jewish readers that sinful human nature extends to all of us–the entire human race, Jew and Gentile fell in Adam. Speaking of this present evil age, Paul writes, "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." The very essence of being born dead in sin and trespasses is that we live in this present evil age, along with all of the others enslaved to the desires of the flesh. The collective goal in life of sinful humanity is to indulge our sinful desires, and to seek self-gratification, often at the expense of others. Paul lists the specifics of this in Galatians 5:19-21. "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." This list refers to the attitudes of mind as well as acts of the body.

Christians retain this sinful nature (the flesh). Like a freed slave, we must learn to live as a freedman. So too those of us who were born in sin and who remain inhabitants of this sinful and evil age must learn to think and behave like citizens of the age to come. As some have pointed out, this is essence of the Christian life–the life-long struggle to live out our new justified status in Christ. This means that those whom have been united with Christ will struggle against sin and the desires of the flesh until we die. But non-Christians know nothing but the things which Paul says are characteristic of the sinful nature and this present evil age. The passions of the flesh are the only thing they know. They are blind to the truth. They remain indifferent to eternal things and they choose to ignore their very real peril.

For Paul these sinful actions and desires stem from the fact that we are by nature children of wrath. We all possess a sinful nature which produces the sinful thoughts and desires Paul describes here. We sin because we are sinners. We sin because it is our nature to do so. We will not and indeed cannot come to faith in Christ, unless and until the Holy Spirit calls us to faith and unites us to Christ. This is what we mean when we speak of "total depravity." Our wills are enslaved to our sinful affections. We choose freely in the sense that no one else compels us to choose that which is evil. But since our nature is sinful, we will only choose (freely) sinful things. As Jesus himself put it, the bad tree must be changed into a good tree so that good fruit begins to appear. Apart from God acting upon us, we will remain dead in sins and trespasses. Slaves cannot free themselves. Dead people cannot resurrect themselves. People who are sinful by nature will not "choose" Christ.

But Paul does not leave us under condemnation. In verse 4, the apostle writes "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." This is about as clear an affirmation of sola gratia (grace alone) found anywhere in Scripture. Paul's words here echo passages such as Isaiah 54 (our Old Testament lesson) where the Lord graciously calls and redeems Israel, despite Israel's unworthiness. Notice carefully what Paul says–it was while we were "dead in sin," unable and unwilling to do anything to save ourselves, that God (whom Paul says is both loving and rich in mercy) acted upon us. As surely as God raised Jesus from the dead in a demonstration of his power, so too he has made us alive with Christ. The same divine life-giving power which raised Jesus from the dead, has given us new life. Through the preaching of the gospel, we were regenerated (born again), we came to faith in Christ (we heard the word of truth), we were justified, indwelt by the Spirit and are now united to our living head, Jesus, who is at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

Paul sums this up with the simple affirmation–"by grace you have been saved," which we now unpack. While we were dead in sin, unable and unwilling to do anything about our condition and predicament, the Father chose us "in Christ," Jesus died for our sins, and the Holy Spirit called us to faith when the gospel was preached to us. This is the meaning of "grace." God is gracious toward us. He pours out his mercy upon us. In this, we see his love for us even while we are in the midst of our sinful rebellion. Notice too that Paul states that we "have been saved." Paul uses the perfect tense here to emphasize that salvation is something we presently possess because of what God has done for us in Christ. Everything necessary for us to be delivered from God's wrath on the day of judgment has already been accomplished for us by Jesus in his sinless life and sacrificial death. This is the meaning of "by grace you have been saved." Paul's focus is upon how we are the present beneficiaries of Jesus' past good works.

Because we have been saved by grace, Paul wants us to consider the ramifications of this as we live out our lives. Because we are "in Christ" God has "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 in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This is a remarkable assertion. As we trudge along through this life, struggling with sin, doubt, weak faith, as we go through all kinds of trials and tribulations, our eternal destinies are already settled and established. Because we have been chosen by the Father, redeemed by Christ, called and sealed by the Spirit (the benefits of the already), God sees us, and indeed treats us, as though we were already raised and seated in the heavenlies places. This is the case because Jesus is present in heaven now, and we are said to be "in Christ." Where he is, we are.

And just as God has already chosen us, redeemed us, called and sealed us, the final goal is assured and our inheritance is guaranteed–so much so, that in the coming ages (another way of speaking of the age to come as being eternal with no end)2 God will be vindicated and we will be the beneficiaries of all that Jesus has accomplished for us. It is the knowledge of this dual citizenship and our awareness of the present rule of Christ over all things which sustains us in our trials and which gives us an eternal perspective on the present, something we could never have if God left us in our sins.

Paul is now obviously excited by thinking about the glories of such things, and he repeats himself in verses 8-9, although he adds several additional points. "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." Once again Paul affirms that we have been saved by grace (the perfect tense indicates a present blessing resulting from something done in the past). But this time the apostle adds this comes "through faith." It is faith which is kindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the word of truth. None of this is our doing. God makes us alive when we were dead in sin. Once alive, we respond to Christ by placing our trust (faith) in him. Faith is not the one work God requires of us. We are not saved because we have faith. Rather, we are saved by the merits of Christ which we receive through the means of faith. Faith, in the biblical sense, is trust or reliance upon another–it is not some sort of existential leap in the dark. Salvation is a free gift. It was given to us despite our best efforts to resist and run away from it. And because our salvation is a free gift from God, we have no grounds whatsoever for boasting about anything that we might do in response to the grace of God poured out upon us "in Christ."

As a brief aside, Reformed theologians have at times debated whether "faith" is the gift, or whether salvation is the gift of which Paul speaks, faith being part of the whole. While I think salvation is the gift spoken of, faith is certainly given us by God as a consequence of our being made alive together with Christ. Either way, the result is the same–we are saved by God's graciousness to us, and united to Christ (the one who saves us) through the means of faith.

Given his panoramic perspective on these things, Paul goes on in verse 10 to speak of how the grace of God which saves sinners, also transforms those already given the free gift of salvation. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We need to be very clear about the relation between God's grace, our salvation, and good works. God has made us alive when we were dead in sin, we respond in faith, and it is because we have faith, that we do good works. That we are created "in Christ" to do good works is indicative of our participation in the new creation brought about by our Lord's own resurrection from the dead. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Since we belong to the age to come and are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies, our conduct will now begin to manifest the fruit of the age to come which, in Galatians 5 Paul describes as the fruit of the Spirit. Here, Paul speaks of God's grace as producing good works. Grace is the cause of which our works are the effect.

To look at this yet another way, God has chosen us in Christ, redeemed us in Christ, united us to Christ through the Spirit, sealed us until the day of redemption "in Christ." Now Paul adds that "in Christ" we are God's work of new creation. We will begin to do those very same good works which God ordained that we would do when we were chosen "in Christ." While we can never be saved by good works, because everything we do is tainted by sin, those who are "in Christ" will begin to do good works, bear the fruit of the Spirit, and start to put to death the deeds of the flesh. We are not saved by our good works. Neither will we be saved without them. The same Jesus who raised us up with himself in heavenly places, will begin in us the process of sanctification. This is what it means to have been saved by grace through faith and then created unto good works.

There are several points of application we need to draw from this passage.

Taking a big picture approach to these things, Paul takes us from the depths of human sin (dead in sin and transgressions) all the way to heavenly places–where those who were once dead in sin, are now seated and raised with Christ. Paul has made it perfectly clear that we can do absolutely nothing to save ourselves. We were dead in sin at that time when God acted upon to make us alive with Christ. This is what we mean when we speak of total depravity–not that we behave as badly as possible, but that we are absolutely unable to do anything to save ourselves, or incline God to love us, or motivate God to save us. We are by nature children of wrath–people who are worthy of eternal punishment. Not a popular message in modern America–but this is what Paul teaches.

But Paul does not leave us with the bad news of the human condition. After spelling out just how serious the human condition is (we are already dead, so it is too late for instructions, spiritual medicine or religious ceremonies), Paul abruptly interrupts his description of human sinfulness when he interjects the following– "but God, who is rich in mercy has saved us by grace, through faith." God has given us the greatest gift imaginable. He has not only saved us (even though we can contribute absolutely nothing to our salvation), but God now calls us his workmanship "in Christ." God unites us to his son, he changes our lives, he makes us citizens of the age to come, and because his promise will be realized, he already sees us as seated and raised with Christ. And all of this is by grace, through faith, apart from works.

And this is what Paul means when he speaks of "the immeasurable riches of his grace."

1. Bruce, Ephesians, 280.

2. Bruce, Ephesians, 288.

### Liner Notes for Ernest Bloch’s “Baal Shem” *Vidui* movement from the Milken Archive at *https://www.milkenarchive.org/music/volumes/view/symphonic-visions/work/baal-shem-for-violin-solo-and-orchestra/#tracks*

Ernest Bloch’s three-movement Baal Shem: Three Pictures of Hassidic Life, for violin and orchestra or violin and piano, one of his best-known works, is named after the acknowledged 18th-century founder of the Hassidic movement, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1700–60). Better known by his acquired moniker, the Baal Shem Tov (master or holder of a good name, viz., a fine reputation), he is also commonly referenced in Hassidic circles by its acronym, the BESHT. The importance of a good name has a long history in Jewish thought, dating to antiquity and to Scripture. Mishlei (the Book of Proverbs) tells us that “a good name is to be chosen over great riches,” and in Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) we find the admonition that a good name is “better than precious oil.” In Pirkei Avot (the ethical and moral sayings of “the fathers,” viz., the rabbis), the most widely familiar of the sixty-three tractates of the Mishna, R. Shimon is quoted as saying, “There are three crowns: the crown of learning (Torah); the crown of priesthood; and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name exceeds them all.” In his commentary on Pirkei Avot, the Very Reverend Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire from 1913 until his death in 1946, noted that a good name alone is “the tribute paid to personality and character.” In support of that explication he cited G. Beer as expanding upon R. Shimon by observing that “a man attains to priesthood and royalty by heredity, and even learning is not invariably accompanied by nobility of character. Only in the case of a bearer of a good name do we find outward honor combined with inner worth.”

Legend has it that it was once brought to the BESHT’s attention that someone in a distant part of Poland or the Ukraine was impersonating him—going around claiming to be the BESHT, ostensibly for his own self-satisfaction, and offering counsel, guidance, and solace. The Baal Shem Tov’s anger was naturally expected. Instead, he surprised the informer by calmly observing that this meant only that he had a good reputation. If an imposter therefore wanted to emulate him, even to the point of impersonation, and thereby offer some benefit to Jews by helping them, so be it: What was the harm? (For further discussion about the Baal Shem Tov, his influence, and his followers who established the various Hassidic dynasties and courts and their sometimes divergent directions, see in the introduction to Volume 6.)

Vidui [viddui], the title of the suite’s first movement, refers to the remorseful confessional section of the Yom Kippur liturgy during which the worshippers enumerate collectively and vocally a catalogue of transgressions committed or likely—even possibly—to have been committed during the preceding year by them or by the Jewish people individually or collectively. Inextricable from the words as well as from the spirit of the viddui, which is at root a contrite confession of guilt addressed directly to God, are the supplicants’ public announcement of repentance, without excuses for acts, deeds, or lapses—“sins of omission as well as commission”—about which they knew or should have known better; their urgent wish to make atonement for the error of their ways and reverse their conduct accordingly with the advent of the new year; and their petition for God’s forgiveness rather than harsh judgment, and thereby for the opportunity to be freed from the deserved consequences or the shadow of their transgressions in order to be able to begin the new year with a clean slate.

The two most prominent components of the viddui are ashamnu (“We have trespassed, we have dealt treacherously … we have gone astray, we have led others astray”), a twenty-four-count self-indictment and pithy summary of all the various averot (sins, or transgressions), and al ḥet, which recalls and articulates these sins in greater detail and with more vivid specificity, albeit still generically. (“For the sin we have committed before You by. . . .). Viddui is recited initially during the afternoon service (minḥa) on the day before and leading up to Yom Kippur, and then repeated throughout its five services.

The straightforward confession of ashamnu is followed by the acknowledgment “We have turned away from Your commandments and Your judgments that are good, and we have gained nothing from doing so.” This in turn is followed by expressions of remorse and pleas not only for pardon but also for God’s assistance in the process of human self-improvement: “Incline our hearts to forsake the path of evil…. Let [viz., help, or ordain that] the wicked forsake their ways and the righteous their thoughts…. Subdue our inclination so that we may serve You; and bend our will to turn to You.” Judaic theology emphasizes here that ki yarbe lislo’aḥ (He is ever ready to pardon). And in other related liturgical passages God is said not to desire the punishment or death of the sinner, but rather that he return from his wrong ways and repent.

The forty-four enumerations of al ḥet (followed by additional references to offenses applicable only historically—when the sacrificial system of the Temple was operative and the judicial authority of the Sanhedrin was in force in ancient Israel—are interrupted periodically by the plea and its periodic repetition: v’al kulam elohai sl’liḥot s’laḥ lanu m’ḥal lanu kaper lanu (For all these transgressions, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!).

It is significant that the confessions and pleas for pardon are recited communally, in a public forum, and in the plural. This has been interpreted as indicative of the responsibility each individual has not only for his own conduct but also for the society of which he is a part. In the latter case, this concerns passivity or complacency in the face of conditions or situations that either permit and promote unethical, immoral, or unjust conditions—which one might assume do not affect him directly but negatively affect others—or enable and encourage the flaunting of the Torah’s commandments and all that they mandate in the continuum of rabbinic Judaism. That principle, of course, is not unique to Judaism or to Judaic jurisprudence, and from legal perspectives it is well encapsulated by the Latin maxim en silentio concordia est (in silence there is acquiescence). Whether this amounts to a coincidence may be moot. But we do know that many of the rabbis of antiquity, dating at least to the early centuries of the Common Era, had some awareness of Greek and Roman culture, customs, and thought inasmuch as they were surrounded by the Greco-Roman world.

It must be emphasized that in Judaic tradition as well as legislation, expiation from transgressions and offenses articulated in the viddui can be forthcoming directly from God only with regard to those deeds or acts whose subjects are considered to be matters exclusively between God and man—such as ritual violations—but do not explicitly involve injury to one’s fellow humans. Divine forgiveness for the latter is deemed possible only if the offender sincerely seeks conciliation from the injured party prior to the close of Yom Kippur (Yoma 8:9). It is not sufficient merely to offer material compensation when applicable or appropriate; actual heartfelt forgiveness must be asked even if compensation has been accepted and received.

If, however, an injured party refuses to grant forgiveness after a third request that he has no reason to suspect is less than genuine, he is, according to Moses Maimonides and the continuum of rabbinic tradition, considered cruel. Nor should he forgive grudgingly or pro forma.

Among the rich Hassidic folklore related to viddui is the interaction on Yom Kippur between the fabled rebbeand rabbi R. Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev and an impoverished illiterate tailor in the congregation who was unable to read or even recite the words. It was near the end of the n’ila (concluding) service, but R. Levi Yitzhak would not permit the shofar to be sounded to signal the end of the fast until he was assured that everyone in the synagogue had asked—and therefore ipso facto received—forgiveness. So when R. Levi Yitzhak asked the tailor how he had repented, he replied with embarrassment that he had simply “spoken to God” in his own words, telling God that the sins for which he needed to repent were minor and inconsequential: keeping unused remnants of cloth paid for by customers for whom he had fashioned garments, so that eventually he would accumulate enough to make a much-needed coat for his child; occasionally forgetting to recite the appropriate b’rakha over a meal; or even accepting a drink of water in the home of a customer whose kitchen might not be kosher. “But You, God, have committed much graver sins against Your people,” the tailor continued, “including removing mothers from their children and children from their mothers, allowing us to suffer in poverty and by oppression, and keeping us, Your loyal people, in exile.” Therefore, he offered God a deal: if God would forgive him his minor lapses, he would forgive God. “You were foolish,” R. Levi Yitzhak told him. “You were too lenient. You held the card. You should have held out for a much better deal—full redemption of the Jewish people; you might have saved the world.”

Referring to customs of going through the motions of lightly striking one’s own chest while reciting viddui—to symbolize “beating one’s breast” in remorse—R. Israel Meir, author of ḥafetz ḥayyim, remarked that “God does not forgive the sins of one who smites his heart; but He pardons those whose hearts smite them for the sins they committed.”

“All Israel, living and dead,” wrote novelist Herman Wouk, “from Sinai to the present hour, stands in its relation to God as a single immortal individual. The mass confession stamps that idea at the heart of Yom Kippur.” The Berditchever might have seen in the tailor that “single immortal individual” who embodied all Israel.

For the liberal theologian Leo Baeck, the concept of atonement contained in the viddui was the desiderata of “return.” Judaism itself, he maintained, is a religion of atonement (unlike so many Freudians who once saw Judaism as a religion of guilt and guilt complexes), and all the elements of Judaic religion are “most intimately combined in the experience of atonement.” Baeck underscored the requirement for directness: that there can be no mediator between man and God for atonement, no symbolic event, and no sacrament or ritual that would substitute. R. Levi Yitzhak’s famous “intercessions”—his defense motions argued before the Supreme Judge on behalf of the Jewish people as well as his accusations—must of course be understood as poetic, not as incompatible with his own always firm simultaneous acknowledgment of God’s welcome supremacy. For it is viddui in Baeck’s conception that brings to the relationship between humanity and God what he called “ethical immediacy.”

## Viddui at https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/prayer-services-for-yom-kippur/

One of the unique aspects of the liturgy of Yom Kippur is a section of prayers called the [Viddui,](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/confession-vidui/) or confession. In these prayers, the community literally recites an alphabet of different transgressions it has committed, from A to Z (or, actually, *Aleph* to *Tav*, the first and last letters of the [Hebrew alphabet](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-hebrew-language/)). The language of the prayers, however, is instructional, for they are all in the plural; the point is that no one single person has committed all of these sins, but rather we, as a community, are collectively responsible. When reciting the lists of sins, it is traditional to gently beat on one’s breast over the heart in a symbolic act of self-remonstration.

**The Text of *Al Chet* (partial)**

*(The "Al Chet" confession of sins is said ten times in the course of the Yom Kippur services.)*

For the sin which we have committed before You under duress or willingly.

And for the sin which we have committed before You by hard-heartedness.

For the sin which we have committed before You inadvertently.

And for the sin which we have committed before You with an utterance of the lips.

**For all these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, atone for us.**

For the sin which we have committed before You with immorality.

And for the sin which we have committed before You openly or secretly.

For the sin which we have committed before You with knowledge and with deceit.

And for the sin which we have committed before You through speech.

**For all these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, atone for us.**

For the sin which we have committed before You by deceiving a fellowman.

And for the sin which we have committed before You by improper thoughts.

For the sin which we have committed before You by a gathering of lewdness.

And for the sin which we have committed before You by verbal [insincere] confession.

**For all these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, atone for us.**

For the sin which we have committed before You by disrespect for parents and teachers.

And for the sin which we have committed before You intentionally or unintentionally.

For the sin which we have committed before You by using coercion.

And for the sin which we have committed before You by  desecrating the Divine Name.

**For all these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, atone for us.**

For the sin which we have committed before You by impurity of  speech.

And for the sin which we have committed before You by foolish  talk.

For the sin which we have committed before You with the evil  inclination.

And for the sin which we have committed before You knowingly or unknowingly.

**For all these, God of pardon, pardon us, forgive us, atone for us.**

**Psalm 32**

*Of David. A* maskil.

1Blessed is the one

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

2Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord does not count against them

and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3When I kept silent,

my bones wasted away

through my groaning all day long.

4For day and night

your hand was heavy on me;

my strength was sapped

as in the heat of summer.

5Then I acknowledged my sin to you

and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, “I will confess

my transgressions to the Lord.”

And you forgave

the guilt of my sin.

6Therefore let all the faithful pray to you

while you may be found;

surely the rising of the mighty waters

will not reach them.

7You are my hiding place;

you will protect me from trouble

and surround me with songs of deliverance.

8I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

9Do not be like the horse or the mule,

which have no understanding

but must be controlled by bit and bridle

or they will not come to you.

10Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the Lord’s unfailing love

surrounds the one who trusts in him.

11Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;

sing, all you who are upright in heart!