

Ephesians Series

5. The Importance of Assurance [Sermon Notes]

The Importance of Assurance - you need to KNOW you are a Christian

If you don't, then you need to know how you become one.

Ephesians goes against the grain of human experience and often what passes as Christianity; that somehow gaining favour with God requires you to do something - OR ELSE! That may be going to Church, mosque, temple or whatever, performing certain religious devotions, living life to law - standards set down and if we fail, we perish.

All this lies on a fundamental piece of human understanding: human beings are unfit to exist in the presence of a holy God. That's exactly what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2.

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 (C) in 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. 3 (C) All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Human beings are not fit to be in the presence of a holy God. We are by nature dead. Last week we considered the verse Romans 10:9

Simple faith. That's how people come to Christ, by simple faith. Just a minute, isn't that "easy believism". We can't accept Christ without repentance? Shouldn't people show some sign of repentance before they can accept Christ?

Well, in Ephesians, the word repentance does not appear at all.

What do we mean by repentance?

Repentance metanoia {met-an' -oy-ah}

- a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done

Sometimes we attach too much mystique to repentance. The most basic idea of repentance in connection with the gospel is that we change from seeing things our way to God's way. As we will see later in Ephesians, when we see things God's way, we do things God's way.

That's exactly what we do when we agree with Romans 10:9; when we come to faith in Christ as in Ephesians 1:13 or 2:8. Trusting Christ means to accept God's way of salvation and not going your own. That's what repentance is and Paul doesn't need to define it because that's what is involved.

And that act of faith, which rejects my own way and accepts God's gift of faith is EASY. It's meant to be easy. So if you want to say that's easy believism then blame God - because He made it easy!!

That being said the IMPLICATIONS of making such a decision for Christ are massive and life-changing. I have said over these past weeks that eternal life is the gift of God - it's a GIFT. God is wanting to give it to you. That's why it's EASY to become a Christian.

God wants you to be SURE that you have eternal life. We need to be SURE because we will never realise our potential as the people of God because we are not fully appreciating what Christ achieved for us on Calvary.

The whole thing hinges around these verses.

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

And that is the message of the Gospel. You Are saved by grace though faith. Not by faith plus going to Church, not by faith plus keeping the law, not by faith and being baptised, not by faith and doing good works. You are saved by grace (that's God's unmerited favour to you personally) through faith. Salvation and eternal life is the gift of God - it's given.

If you understand the gift, the implications are far reaching

Gift, thanks and grace are all from the same Greek root - Charis

God shows grace, gives the gift and we say thank you!

But it isn't possible really to accept the gift unless we understand WHY eternal life has to be a free gift.

In doing so we understand that we are all sinners. Paul puts it well here in the second chapter of Ephesians

- we were dead
- we had no way of controlling our spiritual fate
- we satisfied what we wanted

We had no way of determining our spiritual future.

We were DEAD - a corpse can do nothing - it's dead. That was our condition - you may have felt alive but you were a helpless corpse! And that's why there is nothing you could do to merit God's favour.

This definition of dead is defined further - we followed the ways of this world. Our destiny was controlled by the spiritual forces that shape this world - the ruler of the kingdom of the air is satan. And what did God see us as:

3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

BUT.. GOD God intervened in His love. We saw in Chapter 1 that he provided a way to redeem us through the death of the Eternal Son, Jesus Christ. He's done all the suffering and dying, He's paid the price for our sins so He could offer the gift of salvation. And how do you receive a gift - you accept it. A gift is a gift - it's free, you don't have to pay extra.

And there are no strings attached. A gift is a gift is a gift.

Gifts have no strings attached - in fact the only strings in this passage are blessings that God is giving you in addition. Your salvation from first to last has been achieved through Christ. There is nothing extra you have to add.

BUT there are IMPLICATIONS - if we've understood what it cost Jesus to redeem us, if we understand how much God loves us - then we're going to want to repent of all those things which God hates. We're going to want to remove all those things out of or life that spoils our fellowship with God.

That's what repentance is about. It may start as a desire to go God's way as we come to faith in Christ, but repentance is something that is ongoing. We want to please God, we want to rid our life of sin - and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to do it - not my will and my strength but His. Sometimes we fail, sometimes we discover things we have been doing but we shouldn't. We worry about whether we are saved.

I know that for some people in the Church there has been confusion over whether "trusting Christ" is enough for salvation, or whether their life has to change as well. Our experience in Christ is not always as complete as our position in Christ. Salvation is by faith alone and that's the message of Ephesians 2. But for new believers, every area of life is not under the lordship of Christ because they are still a babe. We have become disciples and it takes time to learn and develop as a Christian. The evidence of our salvation is that we start to desire to become like Christ.

Easy believism? Faith without life change? There is no such thing People who do it or believe it don't understand God's message of salvation - look at Romans 6 when you have a moment and you'll see what I mean.

And then we can start doing all those good works that God has planned for us to do.

- are you sure you are a Christian? God wants us to be sure

- you've received Christ through faith but there are things in your life still that displease God. Accept His forgiveness afresh
- Not sure - receive Christ now.