

## Prayer

When we have been ignorant and failed to love You, O Lord, forgive us  
When we have been disrespectful of others and also of you, O Lord, forgive us  
When we have been lost in ourselves and failed to love others, O Lord, forgive us  
When we have realised our sins and come close to You again, O Lord, lift us up  
When we have renounced our failures to chose Your way, O Lord, lead us on  
For You have the power to change our lives, O Lord: Alleluia!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Clothes

If possible, go to your wardrobe and other places where you keep your clothes and whilst looking at them, give thanks to God for His provision. Also, give thanks for the protection they give and other qualities such as warmth, and the way they enable you to present yourself well to others. Give thanks to God for your clothes as you are led by Him who gave them to you.

## Meditation

It is the Lord who brings love into our lives;  
And gives us the courage to believe that evil will not prevail.  
It is He whose creative and revealing Spirit  
Makes it possible for us to see the proof of love victorious.

It is you, my brother and sister in Christ,  
Through whom the Lord loves to work to bless all those in need.  
It is you, the faithful who always persevere,  
Who, sustained by the Spirit, show love's triumphs and success.

It is I who write this and you who read it,  
Together with all the saints in glory, and all who are to come;  
It is I and you and we and they, who testify  
To the One who transforms life, who changes the world by love

For Christ has loved us all in His death  
And the truth of this eternal love is borne in us by faithfulness  
For all eternity.

## Bible Study - Ephesians 2:1-6

<sup>1</sup> You were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> you once lived in, following the ways of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> At one time we all lived among them in the cravings of our sinful nature, following the desires of the body and its senses, and by nature we were children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy as seen through the great love by which He has loved us, <sup>5</sup> made us alive together with Christ even whilst we were dead through our trespasses, (by grace you have been saved!) <sup>6</sup> and raised us up and seated us together with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places!

## Review

The first chapter of Ephesians begins with an incredible outburst of praise to God for His saving work, followed by Paul's overflowing and generous prayer for the churches of Ephesus to which he wrote (ch.1). Paul then moves on, still speaking with the same tone of awe and wonder at the power and mercy of God but reminding the Ephesians of where they have come from. He describes to them the state of sin from which people are saved (2:1-3) and the state of grace into which they are brought (2:4-6). As such, these verses are a classic exposition of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as preached in the early church, and they set the benchmark for the preaching about God's gracious work for all people.

The first three verses vividly describe the state of sinfulness in which people lived without Christ. Although Paul was speaking to the Ephesians, he quickly slips into generalisations which enable all of us to identify with what he says. Here, he does not talk about sin with accusation or rancour, as if attacking some heresy in the church (as he does, for example, in Galatians – see Gal 1:6, 3:1). Neither is Paul assigning fault for sin, speaking of all people as subject to sin from birth; 'by nature we were children of wrath' (2:3). Phrases such as this are as close to what many Christian people think of as 'original sin', by which they mean the principle that sin is endemic within human nature from birth (though it is worth being cautious about the phrase 'original sin' because it was first penned by St Augustine in the fourth century who had a theory that it was passed on through sex; and this is not what most people believe today!).

Paul goes on to say that sin is 'following the ways of the world' (2:2), a powerful yet cutting definition which finds meaning in each generation. However, Paul also talks about sin in a spiritual way; for example 'following the prince of the power of the air ...' (2:2) and also talks about the more earthly 'desires of bodies' and 'cravings of our sinful nature' (2:3). Paul is talking in generalisations, and we should be wary of becoming entangled in speculation about the meaning of 'power of the air', because it is best understood as the spiritual forces in heavenly places which influence us to sin, or what we might otherwise call the works of Satan. Satan is the highest representation of evil in the Bible and by definition he acts against us and contrary to the will of God (as he does, for example, in the book of Job). So whilst some sins such as the 'cravings' and 'desires' Paul mentions are people's own fault, there are others which come to us from beyond ourselves; such is the work of Satan. Paul encompasses all the Biblical evidence for how sin works in these short yet powerful phrases, and each of us is left to work out our own responsibilities for sin, and whether we have been drawn into it by Satan and the powers of the world, tempting us to go against the will of God.

The breadth of Paul's description of sin may be challengingly extensive, but this is the background against which he describes the love and mercy of God in salvation; 'God, who is rich in mercy as seen through the great love by which He has loved us ...' (2:4). Paul tells us that God planned and executed the rescue of humanity through Jesus Christ, even while people remained stuck in their sinful state and separated from Him. For this reason, Paul speaks of the glory of God's 'grace', which is His favour and unconditional love. This is God's sole motivation for saving sinful people even though they can never deserve it. The summary way Paul describes this is now universally known: 'by grace you have been saved!' (2:5). In this part of the letter, Paul has not mentioned our response to God, which is 'faith'. Paul continues to speak primarily about God because the work He did to conquer sin was His work and not ours. We are not saved by our faith; we are saved from sin by God's grace, and our faith enables us to take hold of God's grace and gain the assurance of our salvation through the Holy Spirit; but that part of the message is for later!

The majestic driving force of all Paul says in these opening chapters and verses of Ephesians is the glory of what God has done; and there are times when we need to back away from parading our part of the story of salvation (our faith) because we must let the powerful light of God's grace shine through. It is this which will draw people to God, through Christ.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the sins which most commonly destroy people's lives today? Are they the responsibility of individuals or the work of Satan?
2. Discuss in your group what you mean by the word 'grace', particularly in the expression 'God's grace'.
3. How can someone who has always been aware of the presence of God in their lives speak about a previous 'life of sin' as implied in this text?

## Discipleship

Write down a private list of those things which you believe to be sins which affect your own life. If you wish, you could share this exercise with someone you love, but there is value in doing it privately first of all, and sharing it later. Look at the list you have created and consider which sins are things you should take direct responsibility for, and which sins have come as a result of events and circumstances which may best be called the work of Satan. Pray into each one accordingly; confess your sins and oppose Satan.

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, the glory of Your presence lies in the power of Your Cross to defeat evil and give us victory over the enemy! In your name, Lord Jesus, we stand against the powers of evil and claim victory against Satan and death. We know we are set free in You, Lord Jesus; AMEN