

Just As ... I AM: A Bible Study

Ephesians 2:1-10

“Just” can mean “barely.” “Just” can mean “only.” It implies “not enough to measure up.” It captures and conveys the burdens we experience existing in a broken world. But “just” also carries a beloved joy for Christians. We have a just (good and right) God. He justifies (forgives and saves) our hearts and lives, and He works justice (defense and vindication) for the victim and the vulnerable.

In the same way, “I AM” sounds familiar and dear to us. “I AM” proclaims the intimate covenant name and identity of our Almighty Father. “I AM” expresses both the confession of our sinful insufficiency and the confidence in our Savior’s promises. Our Lord is the God of life and living who brings presence and power.

“Just as I AM” gives synonym for the image of God. Every human being, from fertilization to forever, has been made just as the I AM by His grace. We may receive each neighbor as much a gift and a privilege as the Most High Himself—no matter how their age, appearance, or ability seem to leave them “barely” or “only.”

St. Paul the Apostle’s Epistle to the Ephesians clearly declares and explains this Gospel reality. This second chapter especially gives answer to what makes human life of value. It invites us to think about living and dying in depth beyond how our culture and nature incline us to do. Above all, it lays bare the effects of both human guilt and heavenly grace, and it demonstrates whose activity matters most and where our race’s energy comes from.

- Which of your handiworks has made you most delighted?
- How do you remembering first encountering death as a child? What thoughts or feelings do you recall having?
- How does this Scripture define death? How does it characterize living? What makes these differ from customary conceptions?

- How does the “walking” in this Scripture involve bodily movements? How might it signify other dynamics (and even sometimes the lack or absence of movement)? How can this help reimagine what human life and human beings consist of?
- How does it affect humankind to have “the prince of the power of the air” at work in us?
- Which passions of the flesh do abortion support? How? Which desires of the mind do embryo experimentation or physician-assisted suicide serve? Why?
- What does it mean to have “by nature children of wrath” status?
- Whom might the “us” in this Scripture be referring to or including?
- How has God created human beings? How has He saved them? What does it mean to have a “saved” identity?
- How does this Scripture define and explain grace? How does this apply to human worth and purpose?
- What implications does it have for humanity to have God at work in us?
- What good works do you believe God has prepared for humankind? How do these compare to what the world typically considers as commendable aspirations or accomplishments?

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- Which of your handiworks has made you most delighted?

Responses may vary. Handiworks might include artistry or craftsmanship, jobs or hobbies, services to a neighbor or favors for others, academic or home improvement projects, physical feats or competitive achievements, awards or recognitions, and more.

- How do you remembering first encountering death as a child? What thoughts or feelings do you recall having?

Responses may vary. Some may cite the body of a wild animal, the slaughter of livestock, or the death of a pet. Others may mention the funeral of a loved one after illness, a tragic accident in the community, or a news report about homicide, disaster, or warfare.

- How does this Scripture define death? How does it characterize living? What makes these differ from customary conceptions?

Death here appears to correlate to enslavement to temptations and sinfulness (2:1). It refers to a condition of worshiping self and serving flesh (2:3) apart from knowledge of God and trust in Him. This deadness actually coexists with breathing and moving and thinking and willing – one can simultaneously meet the scientific definition of “alive” and the theological definition of “deceased.” Living, for this passage, indicates forgiven by God and connected to Christ Jesus. It means receiving and believing the benefits of His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This living can precede and even persist after any operations of the conscious mind or motions of the physical body have ceased.

- How does the “walking” in this Scripture involve bodily movements? How might it signify other dynamics (and even sometimes the lack or absence of movement)? How can this help reimagine what human life and human beings consist of?

The author talks on the one hand of walking in trespasses and sins (2:1-2) and on the other hand of walking in the good works that God has prepared (2:10). This walking represents primarily a disposition or relationship. Actions of the anatomy and patterns of behavior certainly result from and reflect these states of the heart, but being – and belonging – comes ahead of doing in biblical walking. What one loves, trusts, and wants animates one’s conduct. This mitigates against reducing humanity to a collection of intellectual abilities or a series of physiological proficiencies. Human denotes inclusion in a specific race, order, and community, part of a structure and system larger than oneself and one’s exertions.

- How does it affect humankind to have “the prince of the power of the air” at work in us?

We do not have the autonomous control of our choices that we would like to believe. Our bodies and lives function at least to a significant degree as instruments and agents of a force or entity originating outside ourselves. The devil, the world, and the sinful nature exercise substantial influence on all human desires and deeds.

- Which passions of the flesh do abortion support? How? Which desires of the mind do embryo experimentation or physician-assisted suicide serve? Why?

Abortion facilitates lust in that it primarily offers cover for sexual license (the illusion of intercourse without consequence). It also empowers pride (my likes matter more than anyone else’s needs), greed (marriage and childbearing require the sharing of resources I would rather hoard for myself), fear (these difficulties are going to destroy me), deception (I have to hide from these realities and hide them from my neighbors), and even anger (I want to cause harm to another because of the harm caused to me). Every endeavor to use death as a solution to difficulties conspires on behalf of control (rather than trust), immediate

gratification (instead of eternal security), competition (in lieu of community and compassion), and surrender (as substitute for courage and endurance).

- What does it mean to have “by nature children of wrath” status?

Children remain bound to personages and powers other than themselves. They are helpless and dependent, usually not even knowing any better, and they face a future of growing into an embodiment and amplification of what has brought them into being. Here punishment for the crimes of their kind is what possesses them, leaving them no rights, and suffering vengeance is their destiny, offering them no recourse. This Scripture asserts that every human being fits the description.

- Whom might the “us” in this Scripture be referring to or including?

In one sense, the Apostle’s reference to “us” appears to encompass the whole human race (“the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived... like the rest of mankind,” and, “made us alive together in Christ ... we are his workmanship”) with respect to the universal nature of sin and the comprehensive extent of forgiveness. In another sense, it seems “us” involves exclusively baptized and believing Christians (“seated us with him in the heavenly places,” and, “have been saved through faith”). Taken together, it implies that the Lord God Almighty intends for every member of the species to have a place in His kingdom and a part in His family.

- How has God created human beings? How has He saved them? What does it mean to have a “saved” identity?

Our Almighty Maker has brought humankind into being more intimately and meticulously than any other creature. The Scriptures describe Him forming our kind personally (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:13) rather than just verbally and animating us with His own breath. He has designed every human being to reflect and embody His own image, and He intends each body as dwelling place for His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). He continues to carry out this work through the structures of marriage and the processes of procreation from the very moment of fertilization. This same Lord God saves the whole race, whatever our ages and appearances and abilities, by incarnating into our world and taking on our nature as the tiniest embryo, living and serving ideally in our place, suffering and dying on our behalf, and rising again from the dead in the body for our benefit. Saved conveys that our significance derives from someone else taking responsibility for us. Belonging and becoming establish our identity more than just being or doing, and the future imposes greater influence than the past.

- How does this Scripture define and explain grace? How does this apply to human worth and purpose?

Grace has the sense of gift: unconditional, external, and effective. But it also encapsulates a character quality more than a substance or object: benevolent, compassionate, and generous. God undertakes not only toward us and for us but in us and through us along with our every neighbor and the entire creation. All the offspring of Adam and Eve have the value of whatever He has invested in us, and nobody else's size or skills or circumstances can either improve or impair it.

- What implications does it have for humanity to have God at work in us?

It holds us accountable to others rather than ourselves, namely to our Heavenly Father and our every neighbor. However hopeless a situation may seem, God often operates invisibly, and so appearances can deceive. His wisdom makes the decisions about the nature, objective, and duration of the enterprise and makes the determinations about failure or success, especially when the project entails a person and the process amounts to a life.

- What good works do you believe God has prepared for humankind? How do these compare to what the world typically considers as commendable aspirations or accomplishments?

Responses may vary. Examples include fellowship and compassion, truth and trust, courage and purpose, servanthood and endurance, reconciliation and rejoicing. In length and breadth and depth these far exceed power, property, popularity, prettiness, pleasure, and pride, because the good things of God actually satisfy what He has designed our souls to desire.



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