

Ephesians 2:1-10 (ESV)

By Grace Through Faith

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³among 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. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Introduction

Ephesians 1:10b-12 says, “In [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to [God’s] purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”¹ The goal of the gospel is that those who will listen and believe the message of the truth will glorify God. Ephesians 2:1-10 broadly says that we were all dead in our sins and transgressions against God, but those who believe have been made alive in Christ by God’s grace and for his glory. It is a transformation that should shake our hearts and minds to cherish God and to live our lives in a pleasing manner toward him.

Literary Context of Ephesians 2:1-10

In Ephesians 1:3-23, Paul writes that we have been chosen in Christ for adoption by the Father (1:3-6), redeemed by the Son (vv. 7-10), and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (vv. 11-14). 2:1-10 is actually the first half of Paul’s reminder that the readers have passed from death to life—from bondage to their sin to freedom from their sin. The second half (vv. 11-22) describes both their previous

¹ *The Holy Bible*, New American Standard Version, New Inductive Study Bible (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2000), Eph 1:10b-12. Also, see v. 14.

separation from God’s covenant promises to Israel and their present unification with God and all of God’s children—both Jews and Gentiles.²

The Letter to the Ephesians and the *Purpose* of God

God has added the gospel (that declares the redemptive love of God and his justice) to both creation (that declares the knowledge of God) and the Law (that declares the precepts and character of God). He has revealed himself as the Savior of sinners through Jesus Christ. He accomplished it in history, and it has been written in Scripture that we might know life and salvation by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. He has made himself known to sinners; he has done it to revive their souls and save them from hardness of heart, sin and rebellion. Ephesians 2:11-22 makes it clear that God is gathering to himself a church, and his purpose is to save her (the bride), and discipline her to walk in good works, and to serve Christ while looking and preparing for the approach of her bridegroom (see 5:22-32).

We Were All Dead in Our Sinfulness (Ephesians 2:1-3)

MIT: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Ephesians 2:1-2a).

1. Before Christ, we were *dead* in our sins and trespasses (2:1).
 - a. We were spiritually *dead* to all the things that are pleasing to God.
 - b. We were spiritually *dead* because we have sinned and trespassed against God.
2. Before Christ, we were all walking according to and under the influence of Satan (2:2).
 - a. We *actively* walked in our sins according to the course of the world.
 - b. We *actively* walked in our sins according to Satan.
 - c. Satan is *actively* working in the “sons of disobedience”.
 - d. In our sinful corruption, we were sons of Satan.
 - e. In every way, we walked according to corruption rather than according to God.
3. Before Christ, we indulged in our sinful desires and were all by nature children of wrath (2:3).

² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*. PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 154.

- a. We *actively* lived in the lusts of our flesh.
- b. We *actively* indulged in the desires of our fallen flesh and minds.
- c. We were all by nature children of Satan and wrath.
- d. Both Jews and Gentiles are equally sinful.

Expositional Commentary (2:1-3)

We are undeserving sinners saved by grace; there is nothing good in our hearts, and there is nothing good coming out of us toward God. Our sinful worship is motivated by selfishness. And this all pointedly says, **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked . . .” (2:1-2a)**. Without Christ, we are *dead*. The Bible says this several different ways: we are in darkness (cf. 1 John 1:5-10), we are children of wrath and sons of disobedience (cf. Eph 2:2, 3), our hearts are hardened like stone (cf. Mark 6:51-53), we have eyes and ears but can neither see nor hear (see John 12:39-41; cf. Deut 29:3-5, Rom 11:7-9). Interestingly, Paul says that we were dead in the things in which we once walked; effectively, we were all like dead men walking. This does not mean that we were simply “in danger of death”; instead, Paul makes it clear that we were actively laboring in our spiritual death.³ In the Old Testament, there are a couple of instances that indicate that one could be both biologically alive and spiritually dead at the same time.⁴ For example, 1 Samuel 25:37-38 (NASB) says, “But it came about in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. And about ten days later, it happened that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.” Also, while in the belly of a great fish, Jonah says that God “brought up [his] life from the pit” (see Jonah 2:1-9 NASB). With that in mind, separation from God, including having a heart of stone, is much like death. In other words, “The verb ‘live/walk’ [περιπατήσατε] speaks of the pre-Christian way of life in [Eph 2:2]” along with ‘dead’ (νεκρὸς) in v. 1 in order to colorfully insist that our

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 219.

⁴ David N. Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, eds., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 330.

unresponsiveness to the things of God is caused by our sinfulness and active rebellion.⁵ We actively sin and trespass against God because we have turned our love away from God and have given it to the things he has made and to ourselves.

“ . . . Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience . . .” (v. 2b). Our condition has overwhelmed any ability for us to do good works and cleanse our hands of the sins we have willfully committed. To make matters worse, we were following the natural course of this *fallen* world, following Satan who actively works “in the sons of disobedience.” O’Brien adds that Satan’s present and active evil working in the lives of his victims is so effective that *all* men and women are “characterized by disobedience.”⁶ To put it plainly, our radical corruption in our sin is influenced by the power of Satan and our willingness to indulge in sinful things.

“ . . . 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” (v. 3). The passions of our flesh have both outweighed and destroyed our passion for God. Our position before God is complete depravity, and our hearts are dead to any Good News; and we do not deserve any Good News. We indulge in sin whether we say we like it or not. Donald Westblade, in his chapter on divine election in Pauline literature, in *Still Sovereign*, says that sin “has killed the human capacity for passion toward anything else but the flesh (v. 3) . . . The incapacitation is a moral one that does not hinder us physically but clouds ‘the eyes of the heart’ (1:18).”⁷ Paul is not simply saying that a few people are dead in their sins and trespasses; he is saying that all people are “by nature children of wrath” (v. 3). This does not mean that we cannot create wonderful things (e.g. arts, sciences, literature), but J.C. Ryle rightly says,

⁵ O’Brien, 155.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 158, 161.

⁷ Donald J. Westblade, “Divine Election in the Pauline Literature,” *Still Sovereign*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 72.

“the fact still remains that in spiritual things [we are] utterly ‘dead,’ and [have] no natural knowledge, or love, or fear of God.” Even our best things are tainted by our fallen, sinful corruption.⁸ Both Jews and Gentiles—the first readers of Paul’s letter—and all peoples everywhere today—indulge in their sin. We are all without excuse, and we are all in desperate need of Good News.

Practical Application (2:1-3):

1. In our sin, we cannot possibly respond to the gospel on our own.
2. In our sin, we are all against God and for Satan.
3. In our sin, we are all radically corrupt sinners.

**Our Position Before God by Grace Through Faith is Salvation
(Ephesians 2:4-7)**

MIT: “But God . . . made us alive together with Christ” by grace (Ephesians 2:4a, 5b).

1. But God is rich in mercy and loves his children very much (2:4).
 - a. *But* is an important word.
 - b. God has mercy on his sinful children.
 - c. God loves his children despite their sin.
2. Even when we were *dead*, God made us alive with Christ (2:5).
 - a. *God* makes us alive with Christ.
 - b. By grace, God makes us alive even though our sin had made us dead.
 - c. We are made alive *together* with Christ.
 - d. Salvation is by grace.
3. We are raised up with Christ and seated in heaven with him (2:6).
 - a. We are raised from death to life by God.
 - b. Christ was raised from death to life by God.
 - c. When we are saved, we are seated in heaven in Christ, with Christ.
4. We are raised with Christ because God wants to show us his amazing and abundant grace (2:7).
 - a. God saves his children because he wants to show them grace.
 - b. God’s grace is immeasurable.
 - c. God shows his grace in kindness to those in Christ Jesus.

⁸ J.C. Ryle, *Holiness: The Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, & Roots* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001), 4-5.

Expositional Commentary (2:4-7)

“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—by grace you have been saved . . .” (2:4-5). Our position before God by grace through faith is different than our position in corruption. “But God” . . . thankfully, God’s rich mercy and his great love for his children has given us Christ—“by grace you have been saved” (v. 5b). F.F. Bruce, in his commentary on Ephesians, says “there is a way of release from the hopelessness of existence in alienation from God—an existence which is no better than death” and it comes from God.⁹ We should certainly be quicker to admit that we are undeserving sinners, saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. If we are undeserving sinners, then we have sinned against God’s common grace and have provoked his wrath to his face. We deserve righteous judgment. As a result, the mystery of the gospel is this: though we were corrupt and unrighteous, and in every way against God and without any love for God, he gives us ears to hear the gospel and love it. God’s grace—the mystery of his mercy—saves us for his glory despite our willful corruption.

“ . . . And 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” (vv. 6-7). Christ’s obedient death on the cross satisfied justice and exhausted God’s wrath against our sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21, Rom 3:21-26). And by that, God “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 toward us” (vv. 6-7). In Ephesians 2:1-3, we were lost in our own sin and disobedience. We were willfully children of wrath through and through. But Ephesians 2:4-7 says that God changed that in his children. He made us alive together with Christ. God raised Christ and also

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 284.

raised us in him and seated us with him. Steve Lawson adds that “this enthronement is a *present* reality in the mind of God . . . [God’s children] will display the grace of God throughout all ages to come.”¹⁰ We were once dead in our trespasses and sins, but now, by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have been made alive and new. Our position before God in Christ is righteousness and family. In other words, “what God has accomplished in Christ, he has also accomplished for believers” and it changes our lives from being objects of God’s wrath to sharing in God’s joy in what Christ has done.¹¹

Practical Application (2:4-7):

1. God is abundantly loving and gracious.
2. We were dead, but God made us alive.
3. We were raised with Christ and are with Christ and will be with Christ.
4. God wants to show his love and grace to those in Christ.

**The Purpose of God in Salvation
(Ephesians 2:8-10)**

MIT: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” for good works for God’s glory (Ephesians 2:8a).

1. Salvation is by grace through faith (2:8).
 - a. We are saved by grace through faith.
 - b. Salvation is not our work.
 - c. Grace and faith are the gift of God.
2. Salvation is not a result of works, *so that* no one may boast (2:9).
 - a. Salvation is a gift of grace alone.
 - b. It is a gift of grace alone *so that* no one may boast.
 - c. God is glorified by giving us grace through Christ alone.
3. With Christ, we are God’s workmanship created by him, for him (2:10).
 - a. We are God’s workmanship.
 - b. We were made alive in Christ for good works.
 - c. God did all of this beforehand, that we should walk in good works.
 - d. We are saved that we should walk in good works because good works glorify God.

¹⁰ Steven J. Lawson, *Foundations of Grace*. A Long Line of Godly Men, vol. 1 (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2006), 426.

¹¹ O’Brien, 167.

Expositional Commentary (2:8-10)

“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” (2:8-9). Amazingly, we have been saved by grace through faith. We had nothing to do with our change in position before God. We had nothing to do with our stone hearts coming alive again. Grace and faith are not of our own doing; they are a gift of God, not a result of works, because “we are his workmanship, created in Christ for good works” (v. 10). Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that salvation is not a result of works, therefore it is important to unpack these verses in order to define the role of grace and faith in salvation. First, Calvin writes that Paul “does not say that the will is prepared, and is then left to run by its own strength . . . to make our own choice.”¹² Paul simply says that we have been saved by grace through faith, not by works. Both ‘grace’ (χάριτί) and ‘faith’ (πίστεως) are feminine, and both ‘this’ (τοῦτο) and ‘gift’ (δῶρον)¹³ are neuter, so the reference to faith also being a gift from God is not necessarily plain.¹⁴ However, Ephesians 2:8-9 does tell us that God does *not* save sinners by their works. Therefore, “Faith is something other than a work.”¹⁵

Second, it is also important to affirm that God does not want faith to be of our own doing. If it was, we would be able to boast that salvation, in part, was our own work.¹⁶ In view of that, faith is a response that is only made possible by God’s grace in salvation—“It is simply breathing the breath that God’s grace supplies.” This does not mean that we are being treated like machines; rather it means that God has made our *dead* hearts *alive* by reviving us in Christ, and our most natural response to that is faith. Paul mentions faith at least eight times in his letter to the Ephesians, always referring either to faith

¹² Calvin, 229.

¹³ *Greek New Testament*, 657.

¹⁴ Bruce, 289.

¹⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 68. This, of course, is not meant to take away from our responsibility to respond in faith to the gospel; however, we should never disconnect faith from God’s work in regeneration. Without God giving us the grace necessary to make us alive, we could never respond in faith to the gospel. In election, it also seems that those whom God chooses will certainly respond in faith to his grace for salvation.

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 61.

that gives us confidence in knowing God, or faith that shields us from Satan (see 3:12, 6:16), or faith as an outward response that accompanies grace for salvation (see 1:15, cf. 4:5).¹⁷

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (v. 10). The reality in our experience is that each of us continues to fail regarding worship in spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:23-24, Rom 7:19). But the gospel is for God’s children, and through Christ our worship is acceptable and pleasing to God. Although we are still sinful, our position in Christ cannot be changed, and God does not want to change it.

But there is more to it. We may still be sinful, but Christ has still saved us. Our boasting must be boasting in Christ. That should be our response of love toward God, and that is proper worship. God is renewing our hearts and minds in Christ “that we should walk with them” (v. 10). The concept of worship and works in light of Ephesians 2:8-10 cannot be legalistic moralism. If it were, we would be trying to make our position of grace before God a result of our own works. But instead, it should be a response of love toward God that says, “I am so sinful. But by the grace of God through Christ, I am so thankful that God has forgiven me and made me clean. And now I want to live my life in a pleasing manner of worship as best I can by God’s grace, because I love him.” Ephesians 2:1-3 must not be separated from Ephesians 2:4-10. There is a big contrast between the way we formerly walked in our sins and the way we should presently walk in the good works God has “eternally planned for us to do.”¹⁸ And, it should give us great joy and confidence toward God, because we are the work of his hands, and we are being molded to be more like Christ day by day, until he completes it—and he certainly will.

Practical Application (2:8-10):

1. God saves us by his grace alone through our faith alone.
2. We cannot claim that we have added anything to God’s grace for salvation.
3. With Christ, we have been made to serve and love God, for his glory.

¹⁷ Edward W. Goodrick et al., eds., *NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 375.

¹⁸ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*. The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 85.