

By Grace We Have Been Saved

Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verse: 2:5

“[God]...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.”

In order to understand today's passage, it helps to have a bird's eye view of the entire book of Ephesians. In chapter 1 Paul praised the Triune God for his marvelous work in each church member. Paul also prayed for the believers to grow in the knowledge of God and to be enlightened to see the hope of God's calling, a rich inheritance in the saints, and the incomparably great power of God. In chapters 2-3, Paul mainly focuses on the church: individual believers are new creations in Christ (2:1-10), who together form one new humanity (2:11-21) and reveal the manifold wisdom of God (3:1-13), as we come to know Christ's love deeply, which is the foundation of the church (3:14-21). In chapters 4-6, Paul teaches practical applications: unity and maturity in the body of Christ (4:1-16), a new lifestyle (4:17-5:20), new relationships (5:21-6:9), and how to fight the spiritual battle (6:10-24).

In today's passage Paul helps the Ephesians firmly grasp their identity in Christ. He does so by helping them remember who they were before knowing Christ (1-3), who they are in Christ (4-6,8-9), and why they were saved (7,10). Why did Paul teach this? Remembering God's grace makes us humble. Humble people grow to maturity. If we do not remember God's grace, we become proud, worldly, and self-centered. We do not grow and give a bad influence to others. This kind of pride leads to individual downfall and divisions among believers. So, remembering God's grace is essential for each one of us to be healthy and for unity in our church. Let's think about who we were, who we are, and why we were saved.

First: Who We Were (1-3)

Look at verses 1-3. Paul reminds believers what their past lives were like. They were very dark, like the background of Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." This darkness makes Jesus' grace shine all the more brightly. In verses 1-3, we can find the words "you," "us," and "we." "You" refers to Gentiles. "Us" and "we" indicate the Jews - including Paul. All people, Jew and Gentile alike, are in the same condition. Indeed, Paul's description applies universally to

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all fallen men. We can describe our past lives with three words: “dead,” “enslaved,” and “deserving of wrath.”

First of all, we were dead (1). Look at verse 1. **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....”** Paul identifies two factors as the cause of death: transgressions and sins. The word “transgressions” comes from the Greek word “par-ap’-to-ma” meaning “a lapse or deviation from truth or uprightness.” This means doing what God commanded us not to do. The word “sins,” from “ham-ar-tee’-ah” in Greek, means to “miss the mark.” That is, we fail to do what we should do. We can say these are sins of commission and sins of omission. Romans 3:23 says, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** God made us in his own image - to be like him, and he was pleased with his original creation of man. However, when man sinned, this glorious image was infected with sickness. Man became ugly and hideous like a demoniac. We see the reality of this every day. People who should be kind, loving and generous are selfish, mean-spirited and hateful. People commit violent crimes without mercy. What is the consequence of transgressions and sins? Those who break the law receive jail time or fines as punishment. The ultimate consequence is death. We were all dead in our transgressions and sins. We were not just sick, but we were dead. Dead? Really? People don’t look dead. The people we interact with every day, and the celebrities we see: world class athletes, genius intellectuals, and movie stars, seem to be living and vivacious. Are they dead? As for many of them, yes! Here “death” means separated from God, the source of life. In relation to God, we were like a corpse. If God spoke to us, we did not hear him; if God was near us, we were not aware of it. We had no response to God. We were dead in transgressions and sins.

Secondly, we were enslaved (2-3a). Verses 2-3a say, **“...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. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts....”** Here “the spirit who is now at work,” refers to Satan. Satan works through two channels. One is the ways of this world. Another is the cravings of our flesh and its desires and thoughts. One is from outside of us, and the other is within. Satan’s purpose is to drive us away from God by making us disobedient and rebellious. We have all experienced this, even from an early age. But we should know that Satan works through it. Then, what are the ways of this world? Ruling systems create environments in which God is denied and Christians are persecuted. Cultures pressure people to follow a godless lifestyle. Fashion is very attractive. But under the allure, there is a danger. A friend

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of mine who works in the fashion industry in another country said it is utterly corrupt and godless. Entertainment and activities such as gambling and partying can become channels of Satan's work to enslave people. Such are the ways of this world. An even greater danger lies within, through the cravings of our flesh. 1 John 2:16 calls them **"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."** Lust is a mastering desire or craving which perverts natural human appetites. It can be lust for food, sex, money or power. The pride of life refers to an insolent, empty confidence, trusting one's own power and resources, and shamefully despising and violating divine laws and human rights. The devil also works through these inner enemies. When we follow the thoughts and desires of our flesh, we may seem free. But actually we become helplessly enslaved.

Thirdly, we were deserving of God's wrath (3b). The most serious consequence of our past life was that we were deserving of wrath. Look at verse 3b. **"Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."** Here the words "by nature" refer to original sin. People don't like the doctrine of original sin. But the Bible teaches this very clearly. Romans 5:19 says, **"...through the disobedience of the one man, many were made sinners..."** And David confessed, **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me"** (Ps 51:5). In our sinful nature, we provoke God. So, we were the object of God's wrath. God's wrath is not like human anger. God does not just lose his temper and blow up. Rather, God's wrath is his expression of judgment against evil out of holiness. It is uncompromising and just. God's wrath does not contradict his love. They are like two sides of the same coin. John 3:36 says, **"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."** Here "God's wrath" refers to eternal condemnation. We were dead in transgressions and sins. We were enslaved by Satan through the world and the flesh. We were eternally condemned. This was our past life.

Second: Who We Are (4-6, 8-9)

Dead men have no power at all; slaves cannot free themselves; the condemned have no way to change their destiny. Then how could we be saved? Look at verses 4-5. **"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."** Here the word "but" marks a great transition: It is from death to life, from enslavement to freedom, from condemnation to justification, from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from being an object of wrath to an object of love. How was it possible? We can find the

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answer only in God himself. In verses 4-7 we find four attributes of God: great love, rich mercy, grace, and kindness. When we study verses 1-3, it is evident that we were wretched, miserable sinners. Paul does not credit us with even a small spark of loveliness. But God is rich in mercy and full of compassion. Out of his great mercy and compassion, he sent his one and only Son. God demonstrated his love for us in this way: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8).

Verse 5 says that God **“made us alive with Christ.”** This phrase comes from the Greek word “sood-zo-op-oy-eh’-o.” This is a compound word that comes from the Greek words “soon,” which means “together,” and “dzo-op-oy-eh’-o,” which means “make alive.” So most Bible translations say that God “made us alive together with Christ.” As God’s incomparably great power raised Christ from the dead, he also raised us from the dead. God’s incomparably great power made us alive. When we were spiritually dead, we were ignorant of God’s presence, deaf to his word, and unable to respond to him at all. But now that we are alive with Christ, we experience God’s presence moment by moment. We can hear God’s voice. We can pray to God and he hears us. We can praise and worship God in sweet fellowship. Christ’s life is imparted to us. We are alive! How does this happen? In 1:13 Paul said that when we heard the message of truth, the gospel, and believed, we were included in Christ. Jesus said in John 5:24-25, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”**

God not only made us alive with Christ, he also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (6). Here, being seated with Christ in the heavenly realms means that we reign with him. 2 Timothy 2:12a says, **“If we endure, we will also reign with him.”** After saving us, God did not send us away, saying, “Okay, go, live by yourself.” Instead, he raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms. Wow! We got a great promotion. This great promotion gives us dignity. In King David’s time, there was a man named Mephibosheth. He was crippled and burdensome. Yet, to show kindness to his father, Prince Jonathan, King David invited Mephibosheth to dine with him at the king’s table every day. Likewise, by God’s favor through Christ, we have been lifted up to sit at the King’s table. We have fellowship with God through Christ; we can know his will, and we participate in his reign. This could make us proud. So Paul emphasizes that it is only by God’s grace. He said in verse 5b, **“...it is by grace you have been saved.”** He repeated this again in verses 8-9, saying, **“For it**

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is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” Salvation is the free gift of God. It is given out of the sheer generosity and love of God. It is too expensive to earn. We could never deserve it. God gives it to us freely when we are in Christ. It is God’s free gift to us, like the air. We can freely breathe the air in this world. We enjoy this privilege unconsciously moment by moment. But if we travel to Mars, we must use an oxygen suit which is very expensive and awkward. Being in Christ is like living in the atmosphere, we enjoy the free gift of salvation moment by moment. But it is only in Christ.

We have been saved by grace. It is not due to anything we have done, but totally to what God has done for us in Christ. If we contributed even 1% to our salvation, we would boast about that 1% and become proud and useless. But because all of the credit belongs to God, we can be humble. When we remember God’s grace, our souls are refreshed. His grace circulates within us and gives life and peace. Strength and wisdom to serve God arise in our souls. That is why Paul always remembered God’s grace. This is how we can maintain God’s blessing. Whenever I remember God’s grace to forgive all my sins of lust, pride, selfishness and greed, I cannot but stand amazed. My soul is refreshed and I praise and thank God from the depth of my heart. I become humble in doing God’s work. This motivates me to respect others and work together with them for the glory of God. In this part, we find that God’s grace is the foundation of our identity in Christ; it is the basis for true unity. This is why we should remember God’s grace.

Third: Why We Were Saved (7-10)

Thus far we have seen that God’s amazing and marvelous grace of salvation has been poured out on undeserving sinners like us. Why did God do this? We can find the reasons in verses 7-10. Look at verse 7. **“...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”** We learned in verses 4-7 that God was motivated by his own love, mercy, grace and kindness to save us. We could be saved only by the incomparable riches of God’s grace. Though we are the objects of God’s grace, his purpose extends beyond us to make his grace known to others through us, not only in our own generation, but throughout the ages to come. God is pleased to save people through the personal testimony of others (1 Cor 1:21). For example, a Samaritan woman encountered Jesus as the Messiah and then testified about him. Her entire village came to hear Jesus personally. Again, after Jesus drove out the demons from a man, he told him, **“Go home to your own people and tell how**

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much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed (Mk 5:19-20). This is the way God works. Those who have received God’s grace have one thing to do: it is to testify to the riches of God’s grace. Those who hear testimonies and those who share testimonies both receive grace. Then God’s grace overflows.

In verses 8-9 Paul repeated **“...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”** People want to boast about something. Even the Gentile believers wanted to find something in themselves to boast about regarding their salvation. We are tempted to boast about our faith, saying, “I have great faith - more than you!” But even faith comes from God. We have nothing to boast about in ourselves. 1 Corinthians 1:31 says, **“Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.’”**

Verse 10 expounds further why we were saved. It says, **“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** In verse 8, Paul uses “you,” but here Paul uses “we...us.” This means that God's salvation is for both the Jews and the Gentiles. We are all created in Christ Jesus and we are a “new creation.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, **“If anyone is in Christ, a new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”** The word “handiwork” means that we are God’s masterpiece. We were dead, enslaved, and condemned. But God made us alive, forgiving all our sins. God made us a new creation and included us in his marvelous mosaic of salvation. This was not done at random or in a reactionary manner, but was prepared in advance. As we saw in chapter 1, it was God’s plan, and we were chosen and predestined before the creation of the world for salvation and good works. This truth came upon Dr. Samuel Lee, our founder, and changed his life and the world.

Verse 10 ends with the words “to do.” This comes from the Greek word “per-ee-pat-eh’-o” which means “to walk.” The same word is used in verse 2, and is translated “to live.” So this word refers to one’s way of life. Therefore, doing good works does not necessarily mean checking off a “to do” list for God. Rather, it means that as we walk with Christ in our new lives we reveal the incomparable riches of God’s grace. It is a matter of lifestyle, not tasks. Doing good works is not a condition for our salvation. Rather, it is the result of our salvation. When we fully receive God’s grace, we naturally do good works which reveal God’s glory.

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In the past we were dead. But God made us alive with Christ so that we may reveal the incomparable riches of God's grace. Let's remember God's grace and share this grace with others. If we just hold this grace to ourselves, we will become like the Dead Sea. But when we share this grace with others, we can be vibrant and lively like the Sea of Galilee.