

Ephesians 2:1–10

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians chapter 2, the word should be behind me, and we're going to read from verses 1 through to the end of verse 10. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 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.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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. For 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.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Amen. We ask that God would bless his word to us. Let's stick in this passage and think about what God teaches us here in Ephesians 2. And really the word that comes up a few times is that word grace, a familiar word, but possibly a word we're in danger sometimes of misunderstanding.

Because to some people, it's that nice thing that God does where he just turns a blind eye to sin, like a teacher that maybe lets off a child or a parent for misbehaving just because they're in a good mood.

But grace is, it's much deeper than that. That cheapens it. It's not less than that perhaps, but it is so much more. Another way we might wrongly think of grace is it being something that enables us to be good, that it gives us this inner power to do better until finally we've reached God's standard. We're okay with him. And that turns grace into something more like a bottle of water when you're running along or when you're exercising, and it gives a little boost of energy. And again, that completely misunderstands grace. Instead, when we're talking about grace, we are simply and nothing more talking about the unmerited favor of God. We're talking about what God does, nothing about what we do. We're talking about what he does for us and that we simply receive.

[3 : 02] That's all we do. We receive. I do wonder, I know that I'm guilty of this. We sometimes forget all that God does and start to look at ourselves and think, what can I do? How am I going to be a good Christian? Maybe not a bad question to ask, but you see, when we think that that's what makes us okay, when we think that that's what makes us good, then we've forgotten grace. We've forgotten that God is the one who does it all. Even as we see at the end, he's prepared the good works for us to do. It's not that good works are unimportant, but even they are a gift from God for us to do that he has prepared for us. We'll get to that later. But grace, this idea that God just gives us forgiveness, that God just gives us everything we need. Well, it goes against an individualistic society, the one that we live in, the one that says, be yourself, speak your own truth, find your own truth, that says, just be the best you can be. Don't worry about others. Look out for number one, a society that hates the idea of needing, needing someone, especially God. But grace goes against that. And as we look at this passage, what we see is that being saved is what God does for us. And he does it through his son, his beloved son, through Jesus. And really, as we talk about grace this morning, we're talking about Jesus. To talk about grace is to talk about Christ, as many have said. So I just want to very simply this morning follow what Paul tells us about grace here. He explains in verses one to three that we are in a desperate situation of sinfulness. But then he turns to the wonderful grace of God.

So two points. First of all, we are dead in trespasses and sins. But second of all, we are saved by grace. So first of all, dead in trespasses and sins. And really what's happening here is we're being alerted to the reality of who we are, of our sin and the great needs that we have of a savior. We could say that we are dead men and women walking. Because Paul says, doesn't he, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live. They lived in them. They walked in them.

That was their life. Every step that they took was sin. And we're not just talking about the Ephesians, because this is true of every human being who was and is and will be. You know, in films that maybe have a prison scene, the American ones anyway, and that phrase is often heard that the prisoner is walking through the prison and someone says, dead man walking, dead man walking. And because the person's on death row, they're waiting for their execution. It's a foregone conclusion. It's going to happen. And they're just walking towards that. They're on their way. They're not dead yet though, but the sentence is upon them. Well, as we live here, we may go around, we may walk around as if nothing is wrong, as if everything is fine. But the reality is that we're already dead because of sin. Without Christ, without faith in him, without God's grace, we're already dead. And I know that's strong language, but that is exactly what Paul tells us. Spiritually speaking, we are corpses and we are in need of life.

We're in need of resurrection. Because we sin, we disobey what God has told us, his word, the Bible. We transgress, which just means we miss the mark. We're off target. Even when we try and do good, we just go in the complete opposite direction. We get it wrong. In other words, we don't do what's pleasing to God. And if we're honest, quite often, we don't really want to do what's pleasing to God.

We want to do what's pleasing to us. And it's even worse because the truth is that without grace, we aren't even aware of our deadness. And how many people could we say that's true for who just keep going? We don't need God. We don't need help. We've got it. I've got my job. I've got my family. I've got my car. I've got my house. That's all I need. How many people say that? How many people think that? And they don't know we're dead in our transgressions and sins. It is as serious as that. And yet we're blinded to that reality, or at least people are without Jesus.

[7 : 51] And as we walk through this life, well, we're told following the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. And that just means we're following the devil who's been working since the Garden of Eden. That's who we are without Jesus. It was him who tempted Adam and Eve, and he keeps working in those who are disobedient. It literally actually says in verse two, at work in those who are disobedient. It's the sons of disobedience. You could translate it. And what that tells us is that we're born in sin, that it's our nature, that it's our heritage, that it's just the way that we are.

We all belong to the same family of those who rebel against God. And it's not that we're unwilling participants. We love our family. We love being sons of disobedience. We go along happily thinking it's the way to freedom, the way to satisfaction, the way to live. Wholeheartedly, we go for it.

We are happy members of that family. And of course, this language is severe. It really is. But we're going to see it just shows how good God is, how gracious he is.

Paul simply emphasizing how hopeless it is to be outside of God's grace and mercy, how hopeless it is to not know Jesus, to not have him as savior. It's as hopeless as death.

And as well, this sin, it's all our problem. All of us also lived among them at one time. Paul's not just saying you Ephesians. He's saying all of us. He's including himself. We were all like this, gratifying the desires of the flesh. Every one of us have lived this life at some point, a life of self-gratification. We're thankful for the grace of God, but we know what we have been saved from, those of us who believe in self-gratification. Well, it's living for ourselves, making as much money we can for ourselves, going for relationship after relationship, going for pleasure, going for self-worth. Whatever we think will make our lives worth living. Whatever we think makes the good life, whatever that means. And even the good things that we do, like helping those in need, are so often so that other people can see what a good person we are, or so that we can convince ourselves, I'm a good person. And it becomes all about us. And this is what sin does. It turns us in on ourselves. It makes us only see ourselves. And even in the good we try and do for others, we're really thinking about what we can get from it, how we can feel good.

[10 : 32] It's gratifying the desires of the flesh. And we can't escape this. It is inescapable. It is our nature. It is who we are. And as verse 3 says, we are by nature deserving of wrath.

God's wrath. God's judgment. And that's because God is just. He is good. He is perfect. And so when there are things done wrong, He's not blind to it. He's not indifferent, which is actually very good news for this world, because it is at many times a horrible place.

And it's good news that God doesn't ignore what is wrong with the world, but He is just, and He cannot ignore it. He wouldn't be good otherwise. He's there. We deserve that wrath.

And if we were to end our message there, none of us would go home refreshed today. None of us would go home with hope. But Paul has much more to say about what God does for us, those who are dead, those who are sinners, those who are deserving wrath. There is good news for us. And that brings us to our second point. We are saved by grace. That's what we're told twice here. It is by grace, you have been saved, verse 5 and verse 8. For it is by grace, you have been saved through faith.

Most of us probably like to think of ourselves as great climbers. We climb the career ladder. We build up our families. And some of us focus on general self-improvement. We all think that in every aspect of our lives, we can better ourselves. But there is one place we cannot climb. We could get to the top. We could get to the top of our career or wherever, but we cannot climb our way to God. We cannot work our way to God. We cannot make ourselves alive in God's eyes.

[12 : 27] Many have tried. In fact, all of us probably have. But not a single person ever has succeeded. Because the message of this passage is that God does it all. He does it. By grace, you have been saved. By what God does through Jesus, we are saved. And let's unpack that because verse 4 explains that it's because of his great love for us. God's gracious to us because he loves us. He shows mercy to us. As verse 4 says, he's rich in mercy. He's full of mercy. He's not going to run out of it.

But he does it because he loves us. And it's not he will show mercy. It's not that he might in the future show mercy. It's who he is. God who is rich in mercy. Or again, you can translate it, God being rich in mercy. Our nature is to sin. Our nature is to do the things wrong, as we said.

His nature, who he is, is merciful, is rich in mercy, is gracious. He can't do anything but be merciful. Despite his justice against sin, he is also merciful. And he's merciful to us, as we said, because of his great love. Notice it's not because you're a good person, not because you've kept all these commands, because of his great love. His love, the love that made him send his only son, the love that brought the son down to us. Because of his great love, he has made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. Because of love, not because of what we do. This is grace, because it's love. It's not what we do. It's all about his love for you and for me. That's amazing.

I just find that incredible, just to reflect on, to think about. Because of his love, he does it. Nothing that I do. It would be a disaster if it was up to me. But he does it. And we're saved.

We're forgiven. We have new life. We are saved by grace. He does it knowing our sins. You know, he knows everything about us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows even the things that we try and hide from others that we wouldn't want anyone to know. He knows them. And still, we can say this, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. That is what he's done. And of course, he gave us his beloved son. He gave us Jesus for this.

[15 : 21] His kindness is expressed in Christ Jesus. Grace wasn't free to God. It's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called costly grace. The price was his son. And it was paid for us. It is free to us, yes. But the price has been paid because Jesus has gone to the cross. He does it. And verse 6 emphasizes all this, being made alive. We've been raised up by God. We've been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

And that's telling us we've got new life. We've got future hope. There's something ahead. We're already guaranteed heaven. This is good news. We have been given life. We were dead in our transgressions and sin, but he has given us life. He has resurrected us spiritually. And we have hope that we will be resurrected physically when Christ returns. It is by grace you have been saved. Again, verse 5. He's done it. He's done it. He's been rich in mercy. He's been rich in his love. And he's done it. That is God's heart for us. That is what God does for us when we come to him in faith. And it's all done, as we said, in Christ Jesus. Verse 6. In Christ Jesus. Again, it's all about Jesus. It's all about faith in him.

That's where grace comes from. It was him coming to earth that showed that grace. And he's done it so that he can show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness towards us.

In other words, it's so that all the world even can see his goodness. He saves us by grace. And we share that with others and others see it. Again, it's all about Jesus. We see that God saves sinners by unmerited favor, by grace in his son, Jesus Christ. We are looking to Jesus, not to ourselves.

We are looking to him. And it is how me and you and every single Christian is saved by Jesus, by faith in him. It is all of grace and nothing, absolutely nothing of ourselves. We must remember that it's not us. It is grace. It is God. It is Jesus. Verse 8 repeats it, doesn't it? Saved by grace through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Even as Christians, we tend to put the focus on ourselves. We even think about the strength of our faith.

[18 : 03] Have you ever thought, my faith feels so weak? And what we do then sometimes is we base our walk with God on how we feel. We base our salvation not even on our performance, but our feeling, neither our rights. And when we fail, we feel like God couldn't possibly love us. We feel like our faith is dying. But again, we're relying too much on how we feel. And the encouragement of this passage is that even faith is something that God gives to us in his grace. And we actually do nothing. He gives that to us. And that is so encouraging because when we feel like our faith will fail, well, he'll hold us fast. He won't let go because he saved us by grace and he has given us the faith that we have.

This faith is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Verse 8 again. Charles Spurgeon described grace as the fountain and the water that flows, while faith is the aqueduct that carries the gracious mercy to us. So we're not saying that faith isn't important, in other words, because it's God's gift.

But it's just reminding us that faith isn't dependent on our performance. It's dependent on who we've placed our faith in. We have placed our faith in Jesus. And even when we can be so unfaithful, even just in our hearts, he is always faithful. He always carries that grace to us. We place our faith in him. And that is the important thing. It is not the strength. It is not how well we've performed up to this point. It's not even strictly how well we perform after. It's who we have placed our faith in.

It is placing faith in Christ alone. And we can't overthink this. So many people are waiting for the Damascus Road experience. They're waiting for something miraculous. But it's simply believing that this is what God has done for you through Jesus. That he has given his son. That he loves you.

That he is rich in mercy. And that he even gives you faith. And simply believing in his name. We are saved. We are forgiven. We are his forever. And he will never, ever let us go. It is who we place our faith in. Believe in Jesus and you are saved. No matter how weak that faith feels right now, we're even 20 years down the line. Sometimes our faith just feels so weak no matter how long we've believed. But Jesus is still the same. He doesn't change. And he's still there. He will never let us go. This is the gospel. This is grace. This is good news. It is not work so that no one can boast.

[20 : 46] It is always what God does. If one of us, if it was based on our works, we'd be proud, wouldn't we? If we thought we'd gain something from God, we'd be proud. And there'd be some Christians who weren't so good. There'd be some Christians who were a lot better. But no, we are all equal. God has done it.

And this is actually where assurance comes to us. Because it's not about us. Because it's all what he has done. It's not about looking at others and saying, they're so much better than me. Yes, we can learn from others. But it's that he's done it. And that is the way to assurance. Because we lose assurance when we think about only ourselves or only about what others are doing. Assurance comes when we just keep looking to Jesus, when we look to him and keep our eyes fixed on him and on him alone. Not on our performance, not on the things that we do, not on what other people are doing, but on him alone. There is no work that we can do, not by work so that no one can boast.

We often live like work save in our own hearts and also looking down on others who we don't see as meeting the standard. But this is a message of grace. We need God. And it's actually a very freeing thing. It really is. Because if it depended on us, we would never know if we were saved. We would always have doubt. Am I really a Christian? Am I really saved? But no, because it's all what God does.

There is absolutely no doubt. There is absolutely no question, at least in God's eyes. We are saved and we can have that certainty. We are saved because he does it. And it's not dependent on us. And this is the message we need to remind ourselves every day because we're amnesiacs. We forget this. I know I do. And think I must not be good enough. We need this message. We see the lengths that God went to in his love. He gave his son. Do you really think that God would go through such lengths just to say, actually, no. I know I've already given the most precious thing, but no, you've done too much. And of course, that's not what he does. We are saved by faith, by grace, and that cannot be changed.

We have assurance. We have certainty about our position as one of his children, one of his sons and daughters. And he will never push us out. He will never chuck us out the house, but will always have us in his home. The second thing, though, just to close, is that good works are possible. Yes, there's assurance, but as well, good works are possible. We hear this message of grace and some people take it and think, well, it doesn't matter what I can do. I can just live my life and not worry about the consequences and just please myself. But no. Well, first of all, gratitude for all this should motivate us to do good, shouldn't it? When we see his rich love and mercy for us, well, do we not just want to do what's pleasing to him? Do we not just want to do what's good?

[23 : 52] But maybe some of us have the sense that we don't live up to what God has done for us, even still, after all we've said. And we do keep disobeying, and that discourages us.

Well, the thing I would say, this is the experience of every Christian who's ever lived. We've all felt like that. And we're waiting for Jesus to return. We're waiting to be made perfect. And for now, we struggle. God is working in us. He is making us more like Jesus. He's making us more like his son.

We're struggling, and we're not alone in this. We're all together in this. And sometimes we feel like they're doing so well. Why can't I be more like them? Well, no. God is the one working in us.

Or maybe again, we think, well, I don't need to bother now. But we're thankful. We want to do what's good. And so good works come in, but only because God gives them to us to do. We can be encouraged by the last words of this section, that we can do good, and that we should do good. But always remembering the rest of the passage, that it's not what saves us. It's not what makes us a good person. It's not what makes God love us. He already loves us. We've been created. We've been made new, created in Christ Jesus, made new to do good works, which he has prepared in advance for us to do.

And that actually means that we can go out confidently as Christians, striving to do what God says is good. It actually means that we can do good. Again, if we were forgetting grace, if we were forgetting what he had done, we would never be sure if we could go and do the good that he's prepared for us to do. But he's gracious to us, and it's not about us. He's prepared these works, and that keeps boasting away. That keeps pride away. It's not an excuse to laziness. Notice, grace never is, but it takes away pride. It takes away arrogance and helps us to remember who our God is, who our Lord is, and who is the one in control. And we can go and do these good works and be encouraged that we will do good, that there will be results, because he's prepared them. For example, the most basic and important one, well, when Jesus left this earth, what did he tell his disciples? But to go and make disciples of all nations? We're to share our faith. We're to evangelize, to tell others. And that is a scary thing, isn't it? We don't know what to say. We don't know what to do.

[26 : 18] We feel like they must know what a bad person I am, really, so they're not going to think anything good. But God has prepared good works for us to do. It's not dependent on us.

It's not. We go out in faith, trusting that he has prepared these things for us to do. And as we live and as we work in this world, whatever we find ourselves doing, we can do good because he has prepared these things for us. What else can we do but tell others about the grace of God in Christ Jesus, that good work prepared for us? Let me just finish by saying one last thing, that grace means that humility is necessary. This has been behind all this. We're sinners. We're incapable of saving ourselves. Even the faith we have is because of God's grace. All we bring to the table is our sin.

And that should be humbling to us. Pride has no place here. As we reflect on our sin, on our deadness, well, we must look to him and accept this message of grace because it can be hard for us to accept it because we don't want to admit how much is wrong with us. But in looking to God, that's where humility is found. That's where faith is found. Not just in a realistic view of ourselves, but a realistic view of God is the one who saves us from that deadness. And it means we don't judge others harshly. We know that we're all only saved by the grace of God. We don't look down. We don't judge because we know that we're only saved by the grace of God and we're no better than others, those of us who believe. And if you don't know that humility, that accepting of God's grace, if you still have the pride of thinking that you don't need God, that you just need yourself, that you don't need grace, that you can make it, then you need to see Jesus. You need to see his great love. You need to see your deadness. You need to see what he does. He saves us by grace. He freely gives it to us. Where else can we go to but him? He will have you. He will have all of us. He will welcome all of us because of the great love with which he has loved us. We are saved by grace alone. It is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God.

May he bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray to him. Heavenly Father, we are staggered when we remember the great love with which you have loved us. We thank you that you show us grace and help us to have that humility. It does not come naturally to us, we confess. But Lord, help us in our walk with you. Help us to simply trust that you have saved us and let that be the motivation to go out and do good. Lord, thank you that you have given us good to do.

Thank you that you are a perfect God. But Lord, keep pride away from us. Keep us from thinking that we can do it, that we can make you love us more. Lord, you are so rich in mercy. You are so good to us. We are undeserving of these things. But we give you thanks for all your goodness. We pray that your word would take root in our hearts, that we would remember all that you teach us, that your spirit would help us in these things. Lord, thank you for this time. Bless us now, we pray. We ask it all in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.