

## Ephesians 2:1–10 and Conversion

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- What is God’s *grace*? What are some examples of God’s grace in your life?
- If someone told you that he or she was ready to become a Christian, how would you explain what the person needed to do?

### Introduction

Ephesians 2:1–10 explores how God saved us, because we could not save ourselves. From start to finish, our salvation is completely an act of God’s *grace*—which is his unmerited favor that expresses itself in him giving us good gifts. But to understand God’s grace in that passage, it helps to see how Paul discusses God’s grace in Ephesians 1:3–14.

God the Father “has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavens in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). *God blesses us* when he gives us concrete expressions of his *grace*—his favor and good gifts, which we do not deserve. How has God blessed us in Christ? Ephesians 1:4–14 answers that question. For all who are Christians, the blessings include that God chose us in Christ (v. 4), predestined us for adoption into his family (v. 5), redeemed us and forgave us through Jesus’s death “according to the riches of *his grace*” (v. 7), granted us an inheritance (v. 11), and sealed us with the Holy Spirit (who guarantees our future, final possession of our inheritance) (vv. 13–14). Therefore, we praise God, particularly for *his glorious grace* (vv. 6, 12, 14). Ephesians 1:3–14 is a sweeping description of God’s *grace* throughout eternity—from God choosing us in eternity past to God granting us our final inheritance, for which we will praise God forever.

After giving thanks for his readers and praying for them (1:15–23), Paul then explained how God expressed his grace by making us alive in Christ (2:1–10). We organize this passage into three sections: (1) The Terrible News (vv. 1–3), (2) The Glorious News (vv. 4–7), and (3) Receiving and Living by God’s Grace (vv. 8–10). At the end of this lesson, we explore the nature of what theologians call *conversion*: turning from sin and trusting in Jesus.

### 1. The Terrible News: Apart from God’s Saving Grace, All People are “Dead”

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins 2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. 3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. (Eph. 2:1–3)

Before we can truly understand and appreciate God’s saving grace in our lives, we need to confront the painful facts concerning our lives apart from God. Prior to becoming Christians, *our main problem*, though we did not know it, was that we were “dead” (a powerful figure of speech) in our trespasses and sins (v. 1). Regarding our position before God, we were not alive “*in Christ*”; we were dead “*in our trespasses and sins*” (*NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 2119). When people die *physically*, their bodies cease to function, they are completely unresponsive to external stimuli, and there is no life within them (Heb. 9:27). When people are dead *spiritually*, they are not functioning as God intended, they are unresponsive to him, and they are under his just judgment for their sins (v. 1). And for those who persist in that condition, there awaits an eternal “death”—a conscious, eternal punishment from God (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8).

Prior to becoming Christians, we also lived according to three powerful influences. *First*, “we walked according to the ways of this *world*,” which is humanity living in opposition to God (v. 2). *Second*, we walked “according to the ruler of the power of the air,” a clear reference to the devil, who both works within the disobedient and enslaves them to his will (v. 2; cf. 2 Tim. 2:26). *Third*, we *were carried along by* and we *carried out* our sinful desires and thoughts (v. 3). By nature and by our actions, we were under the wrath of God, which is his irresistible judgment on those who oppose him (v. 3).

- Without sharing graphic details, describe your life before becoming a Christian using the categories of *the world*, *the devil (and the demonic realm)*, and/or *your sinful desires and thoughts*.
- How would you explain to a non-Christian the nature of their relationship with God? The nature of sin? The consequences of sin?

## 2. The Glorious News: God Saves His People

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4–7)

God is rich in “mercy”—which is his goodness applied to those in misery and distress (v. 4) (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 239). Because of God’s great love (his committed affection that acts for our wellbeing), he made us alive with Christ (vv. 4–5). God brought us to life with Christ, even though we were dead in our trespasses and therefore incapable of choosing God (v. 5). Spiritually dead people don’t make decisions to come alive. No wonder Paul exclaims: “You are saved by grace!” (v. 5). God also raised us up with Christ: supernaturally and mysteriously, God swept us into his resurrection of Jesus (v. 6). From one perspective, heaven still awaits. But from another perspective, we are already seated with Christ in the heavens,

where we share in Christ's victory over the demonic realm (v. 6; cf. 1:20–21; *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 2119). Why has God chosen to accomplish these acts of grace in our lives? In part, so that “he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” throughout eternity (v. 7). Immeasurable, unending grace!

- Assuming you are a Christian, from verses 4–7 summarize the things God did to overcome the reality that you were *dead in your sins*.
- What responses (in thought, word, and action) to those truths would honor God?

### 3. Receiving and Living by God's Grace: Becoming Christians and Doing Good

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—  
9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. (Eph. 2:8–10)

We are saved by multiple acts of God's grace—including that God made us alive with Christ (v. 5) and raised us up with Christ (v. 6). But God displayed his supreme act of grace at the cross: “In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, *according to the riches of his grace*” (Eph. 1:7). God is the one who sent Jesus to the cross, and God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead—that is the gospel (Acts 2:23–24; 1 Cor. 15:1–4). God saved us by his grace *through faith* (v. 8). This “faith” is not mere intellectual agreement (James 2:19), but it is an active trust in Jesus as a person and what he accomplished for us at the cross. Verses 8 and 9 emphasize that we cannot save ourselves: “not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works.” Why is that so important? Because God will not allow sinful human beings to “boast” in his presence by claiming that they can save themselves (v. 9).

While we are saved by grace alone through faith alone (and not by works), true conversion to Christ will necessarily produce *evidence* of transformed life. *If there are no good works that flow from our “faith” in Jesus, then, by definition, something was deficient in our self-professed “faith.”* We are God's “workmanship” or handiwork, created by God in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God planned for us to accomplish (v. 10; cf. James 2:14–26).

- What is the relationship between *salvation by grace alone* and *a Christian's good works*?
- What evidence of God's saving grace do you see in one another's lives?

## Sound Doctrine: Conversion (Turning from Sin and Trusting in Jesus)

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)
- “Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out.” (Acts 3:19)
- “I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:21)

What we read in “The Path to God” from Lessons One and Two is worth repeating below. Read it carefully to distinguish (a) between *inadequate* repentance and *genuine* repentance and (b) between *inadequate* faith and *genuine, saving* trust in Jesus. ***Turning from sin and trusting in Jesus are inseparable—two sides of the same moral coin.***

God offers forgiveness freely to all, but this free gift must be received in order to be applied to our lives (John 1:12; Rom. 6:23).

*First*, we repent (turn from our sins) by renouncing the ways we value people and things more than God (Acts 3:19; 1 Thess. 1:9). While we should feel sad because of our sins against God, feeling remorse or a sense of regret is not enough. We must proactively turn from sins such as self-centeredness, pride, sexual immorality (e.g., pornography and sex outside of marriage), drunkenness, vanity, greed, and lying.

*Second*, we trust in Jesus as opposed to trusting in ourselves (John 3:16; Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16). Simply acknowledging (or agreeing) in your head that Jesus died and rose from the dead is not enough, for even demons believe those truths. We must trust in Jesus as a person and what he accomplished at the cross. At the same time, we stop trusting in our own good works for salvation, which we can never earn. We are saved by grace (God’s unmerited favor) through faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

Turning from our sins and trusting in Jesus (taken together) is the way we enter a relationship with God, the way we receive God’s grace (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21).

- Suppose a friend says to you, “*I was baptized* when I was thirteen. *I believe* that Jesus died on a cross, and *I am certain* that I am going to heaven because God is a gracious, forgiving God.” However, you know that this person willfully persists in sin (such as getting drunk consistently with no remorse) and shows no signs of moral transformation—no desire for the Word of God, no desire for prayer, and no desire to live a holy life. Considering what you learned in this lesson, what might you say?
- Identify a person with whom you can explain the nature of repentance and saving faith. How and when might you have that conversation in the coming week?

## Prayer