

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 3: From Death to Life: By Grace Through Faith -- Ephesians 2:1-10

There is a particular kind of silence in a hospital room when the monitors go flat. Everyone in the room understands that no amount of encouragement, no clever idea, no act of willpower will help now. What is needed is not advice but resurrection. That is exactly the picture Paul paints as he opens Ephesians 2, and it is the picture he wants us to see of ourselves before God found us. You were dead, he says. Not sick. Not struggling. Dead in your trespasses and sins.

It is not a flattering diagnosis, and Paul does not soften it. He says we walked according to the course of this world, following our own cravings, and that we were by nature deserving of God's wrath. He includes himself. This is not a sermon about how bad other people are; it is the honest truth about all of us apart from Christ. We were not a little behind and in need of a head start. We were spiritually lifeless and could not raise ourselves.

And then come two of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture: But God. The sentence about death and wrath does not get to finish on its own terms. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, made us alive together with Christ. While we were dead, He acted. The initiative was entirely His. He reached into the grave of our sin and breathed life into us, and He did it not because we were worth the trouble but because He is rich in mercy.

This is the passage where the gospel shines at its brightest, and also the passage most often twisted to say less than it means. Paul says we are saved by grace through faith, that salvation is the gift of God and not something we earn or boast in. And in the very next breath he says we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared for us to walk in. Grace and a transformed, obedient life are not rivals here; they are two sides of the same miracle. Dead people do not earn resurrection. But people God has raised do walk in newness of life.

Group Discussion: Paul says we were not merely weak or struggling but dead in our sins, unable to save ourselves. Why does it matter that we begin with such an honest diagnosis, and how does an accurate picture of our former condition make the words but God so powerful?

Personal Reflection: Take an honest look back. What did your life look like when you were following the course of this world rather than Christ? How does remembering what God rescued you from shape your gratitude today?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 3 Paul says we were dead in our trespasses and sins, following the course of this world and by nature deserving wrath. What does Paul mean when he says we were dead, and why is this diagnosis the necessary starting point for understanding salvation?
2. Paul describes a former way of life marked by following the crowd and our own passions. Where do you still feel the pull of the course of this world, and what helps you recognize when you are drifting back toward old patterns?
3. Verses 4 and 5 turn on the words but God, being rich in mercy. What did God do for people who were spiritually dead, and what does Paul say moved Him to do it?
4. Paul roots our salvation in the great love with which God loved us, not in anything attractive in us. How does it change you to know you were loved and rescued while you were still dead in sin, with nothing to offer in return?
5. In verse 6 Paul says God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places. What does it mean that believers already share in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, and how is this a present reality and not only a future hope?
6. If you are already seated with Christ, your truest identity is settled and secure. How would living from that settled position, rather than striving to achieve it, change the way you face this week's pressures and failures?
7. Verse 7 says God saved us so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us. What does it mean that you are meant to be a lasting display of God's grace, and what does this reveal about God's purpose in saving you?
8. Paul says we are trophies of grace, meant to put God's kindness on display. When others look at your life, what do they see displayed: your own goodness, or the kindness of God toward an undeserving sinner?
9. Verses 8 and 9 say, 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. Yet verse 10 says we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. What works does Paul exclude from saving us, and how do verse 10 and the rest of the New Testament keep us from concluding that we are saved by faith alone, apart from any obedient response such as repentance, confession, and baptism?
10. Verse 10 says we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific good work God seems to be preparing for you, and one way the move from death to life is forming you right now.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Titus 3:4–7, saved according to His mercy through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; Romans 6:3–4, baptized into Christ's death and raised to walk in newness of life; Galatians 3:26–27, sons of God through faith, having been

baptized into Christ; James 2:14–26, faith without works is dead; Acts 2:38, repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit.