

# Eph 2:1-10

## I. God has given us participation in the victory of Christ. (1-7)

### A. This is totally undeserved and unprecedented. (1-3)

Before Paul described the great blessing God has given His people in participating in the victory of Christ, He made a disclaimer – a contrast to show the dramatic before/after change which those who are in Christ have experienced. This shows that God’s blessings went against what could reasonably have been expected (taking into account only our situation). The blessings we received in Christ were completely undeserved, and even against what we should have received.

#### 1. Even though you were dead in transgressions and sins. (1)

-cf. Col. 2:13

We were spiritually dead. This is not claiming that we were physically dead, because it is modified by the phrase “in transgressions and sins.” But that should not lead us to discount the fact that we were genuinely dead in the manner which Paul described. Some people object to the idea of us being described as having been dead. They insist that it must be just figurative or metaphorical, because if we were truly spiritually dead, we would not be able to respond to Christ. I understand this objection and its intended force. However, we can compare it to what happened in John chapter 11. Jesus called to Lazarus, who had been physically dead for 4 days, and Lazarus came out from the tomb. By this same logic, we would have to say that Lazarus must not have really been dead, or he would not have heard and responded to Jesus’s command. But that would completely miss the point. Jesus’s command to Lazarus was miraculous. The command gave the new life and ability to respond. In the same way, the fact that we were saved from our spiritual death is miraculous, and in no way was dependent on our ability to respond. And Paul clearly said that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. The point is that it is a miracle of grace that we are saved, because we were in no position to save ourselves or even to merit rescue.

Then Paul elaborated on what he meant by being dead with the phrase “in transgressions and sins”

Sins are anything that goes against or fails to live up to God’s will. At the heart of every sin is the idea that we don’t want to submit to God’s standards of right and wrong, and so we make our own. Because we don’t like God being the One Who has the authority to decide what is right and wrong, when we have a different opinion, based solely on our preference. And so, (at least in the particular issue) we reject Him and put ourselves in the place of authority to decide. Sin is basically cosmic rebellion, rejecting the real God as king and master, and trying to make ourselves to be the boss in His place.

And the word transgressions are just a specific kind of sin. The idea represented by this word is purposely crossing a boundary into something forbidden by God. We go outside of what is right and true into the realm of what is false, wrong, and forbidden.

#### 2. An elaboration on specifically what this entailed (2-3)

##### a Your life and lifestyle were characterized by sin (2-3b)

###### 1) You then walked in sins (2)

This word, translated “walk” is a key word occurring throughout Ephesians (2:10, 4:1, 17, 5:2, 8, 15). It has the connotation of lifestyle. This is the word that Paul will use to describe the lifestyle Christians should live in response to the salvation and new life they have received. In this verse, Paul used it, by contrast, to describe the lifestyle we all used to live before Christ. Which is characteristic of all the world, dead in sins and unresponsive to God. We did not just occasionally sin, but our lifestyle was primarily exemplified by sin. This is what defined our lifestyle.

###### a) According to the standard of this world.

Literally “according to the age of this world”

Not age in the sense of time elapsed, but age in the sense of the time period in which this present world system is the norm cf. v. 7, 1:21

“This world is characteristically an evil world, in which the minds of the unbelievers are blinded by its god (II Cor. 4:4)” Richardson, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, p. 267.

“All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale, - all this is included in the αἰών which is,... the subtle informing

spirit of the *κοσμος*, or world of men who are living alienated and apart from God.” Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 204

Our lifestyle was defined by the standards and thought patterns of this fallen world, with disastrous results.

b) According to the ruling power thereof.

(1) The ruler of the domain of the air

This refers to the devil

In the phrase “the domain of the air,” the word “domain” or “authority” refers to the sphere in which power is exercised, cf. 1:21. And the word “air” refers to the area between earth and heaven, which in that day was thought to be the battleground between good and evil forces, and in this age, temporarily ruled by evil forces. It was thought to be the political domain of transcendent beings or powers.

In other words, Paul said we were conforming to the one with ruling influence over all that is evil and opposed to God.

(2) The ruler of the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience.

“sons of disobedience” is all those who are characterized by disobedience, which is everyone without Christ. They are disobedient to God because the devil is working in their lives. Everyone without the ruling influence of Christ is under the ruling influence of the devil, which results in a lifestyle of disobedience.

2) Also, we then lived in/among them (3a-b)

Our sinful lifestyle naturally produced sinful conduct.

a) We all lived in/among them in the desires of our flesh (3a)

Paul intentionally used the word “all,” so there are none of us who can exclude ourselves from this description.

“lived” is a different word than “walk” used above. It also refers to lifestyle, but with more a focus on overt daily behavior, cf. Titus 3:3

“in/among them” refers to either transgressions v.1, or sons of disobedience v.2

“desires” refers to any kind of inordinate desire, a craving for something forbidden, i.e. lust. This includes, but is not limited to sinful physical pleasures. It is the desire of our selfish, fallen nature, which sees and calculates everything from a self-centered standpoint, putting God in second place at best. And so, these desires are inordinate desires, craving for something forbidden, and accurately described as lusts. In 4:22, Paul said that we were being corrupted by these deceitful desires.

b) We did this by doing the will of the flesh and thoughts (3b)

We habitually did the will of this sinful nature and its mindset. This is the mindset of fallen humanity that does not honor God or typically think about reality with God in mind. In 4:18, Paul will say that humanity is darkened in their understanding, that is, their mindset, without Christ. And because we all had that self-centered mindset, we did those self-centered, sinful things, because they were the natural things to do.

b) The results of this life and lifestyle (3c-d)

1) We were, by nature, children of wrath (3c)

The wrath of God is the inevitable result of sinful lifestyle and conduct. We were under wrath “by nature” just like everyone else

“children of wrath” means those who are characterized by being under wrath. In 5:8, Paul will say that now we are “children of light” because something changed in our lives between our past and present, if we have become believers.

Some say that everyone is a child of God by nature, but that is not Biblical. We are all creatures of God, under His general care and common grace. But unless someone is adopted into God’s family through Christ, they are not a child of God, but a child of wrath.

2) Just like everyone else, (3d)

All humanity, who are without Christ, are under wrath, as the result of the fall into sin. We were under slavery to sin, and disobedient to God. This is the common lot of all humanity without Christ. cf. Rom. 3:23. And in 5:6, Paul stressed that God’s wrath comes on all such disobedience.

## B. But God gave us undeserved participation in the victory of Christ (4-7)

### 1. Because of God's mercy & love (4)

In this verse, Paul gave the twofold reason behind all that God has done for us: the nature of God, and His resulting activity.

#### a But God, Who is rich in mercy

It is the nature and character of God to be merciful and compassionate. Mercy has been defined as withholding some negative consequence which someone rightly deserves. This is not something that God has done begrudgingly, but it flows from His essential character. He is "rich" in mercy. He has mercy in abundance – in overflow amounts. In verse 7, Paul will speak of the "riches" of His grace, and throughout Ephesians (1:7, 18, 3:8, 16) he used this word to describe the abundance of God's character and blessings on our behalf.

#### b Because of the great love with which He loved us

Again, this is pure overflow of God's loving nature into God's loving attitude and action. He has loved us with a great love, a strong love, love to a profound level. And this is the extraordinary love with which He loved us, which is the reason behind all the blessings which Paul will describe in the rest of this passage. All that Paul is about to describe is a result of God's mercy and love

In light of all that he wrote in the first three verses, we are reminded that this is not because we were lovable and deserved God's blessing in any way. Rather we were dead and objects of wrath. In spite of our deadness in sin, God loved us, because He is loving and merciful

### 2. He gave us participation in Christ (5-7)

#### a What He has done for us (5-6)

##### 1) He has made us alive with Him (5)

###### a) He has made us alive with Christ (5a-b)

###### (1) Even though we were dead in transgressions (5a)

This resumes the argument begun in v. 1 by repeating the same phrase.

This makes the following statements about what God has done even more remarkable by contrast.

###### (2) He made us alive with Christ (5b)

"made alive with" is the first in a series of compound forms, most of which are related to the verbs of 1:20. This is the summary term that introduces the rest. When God raised up Jesus and seated Him above everything, we are included with Him in His triumph. In this passage, Paul says that we benefit from all that Christ accomplished as described in ch. 1.

We, who once were dead, have been made alive with Christ. Though we *were* dead, that is no longer the case for those who are in Christ. We have new life in Christ, through the new birth, through God's salvation. This is the extremes of before and after, once dead, now alive. Once a slave to the ruler and standards of this world, now free.

###### b) The reason: You have been saved by grace! (5c)

Paul interjected the reason for this. This almost seems to be an intrusion into his flow of thought. As he was describing what God has done, he just had to express his marvel at God's grace, which did it.

"saved" is a fairly generic term that means to be rescued in some way. The context tells us what we are rescued from and what we are rescued for. We have been rescued/preserved from eternal death. We have been saved from our transgressions and sins, and the resulting wrath of God against us in our dead state of serving sin and the devil. We are saved from living according to the standards of this world. We are saved from living under the evil ruler of this sinful age. We are saved from living according to the desires and mindset of our sinful nature. And we are no longer children of wrath, but we are children of God. And later in this passage, Paul will describe what we are saved for.

And we are saved by grace. That is God's grace – His gracious generosity to us, not only in His mercy not giving us the wrath we deserved, but in His love giving us new life and participation in Christ's victory, which we did not deserve. Paul will later develop what it means to be saved by grace.

2) He has raised us from the dead with Christ (6a)

“raised us with” is a compound form of “He raised him” in 1:20, cf. Col. 3:1. As the New Testament consistently says, because Christ was raised from the dead, bringing about this new kind of life, all His people will experience this same life of the next age. Paul did not say that we *will be* raised, but he said we *have been* raised. This is in the already/not yet tension, and we can partially experience this new life here and now. In some way, we share in the victory of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and the new life He brought about.

3) He has seated us with [Him] in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (6b)

“seated us with” is a compound form of “seated Him” in 1:20. Paul wrote that Christ is now seated above every other authority in heaven and on earth. This does not mean the we as individuals exercise that authority with Christ, but rather, it means that we share in the benefits of Christ ruling with this authority. This means that we do not need to go through any mediating powers or authorities to get to Christ. We already have access above these principalities and powers, so we don’t need to fear the evil ones, and we don’t need to rely on the good ones. We can go straight to Christ, because He has seated us with Him in His place of power.

“heavenly realms” is a key phrase throughout Ephesians, cf. 1:3, 20, 3:10, 6:12

b The purpose for God doing this: so that He may display the surpassing riches of His grace in the coming ages by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus (7)

Paul not only contrasted the way it was with the way it is. He also told us the way it will be, and the purpose for which God did these things.

For all eternity, God will continue to pour out His goodness on us from an infinite supply of His grace and greatness. This will be beyond our ability even to imagine, because it will come from His inexhaustible riches (cf. 1:7, 3:8). We will be the recipients of God’s benevolence forever.

This will be our experience in the coming age, in contrast to the age of this evil world, cf. v. 2, 1:21

But God’s ultimate purpose is not just to give us His goodness. It is to display the riches of His grace – that His greatness and goodness will be publicly displayed, and that all will know and acknowledge His glory. Not only those who receive His grace, but even His enemies in the heavenly realms will all know and acknowledge His goodness and grace, even as they won’t experience it. We are to be eternally displayed in God’s cosmic trophy case, as recipients of His undeserved mercy and grace, to show His glory. This will display that He is the kind of God Who could, and Who would, rescue even dead sinners like you and I, so that He gets the glory and praise for all eternity.

The purpose of Ephesians, like Colossians, is to argue that Christ is greater than any other supposed power or authority or god. And this is also God’s eternal purpose, seen throughout the Old Testament, that the entire universe would acknowledge that He is the Lord. And one of the ways that He will do that is by displaying the riches of His grace to us in the age to come.

## II. The foundational reason for God doing all this: (8-10)

### A. For, you are saved by grace! (8-9)

#### 1. The simple fact: You have been saved by grace through faith (8a)

This is partly a repeat of what Paul already stated in v. 5. But here he elaborated in more detail what this means.

We are saved by grace – grace is the cause of our salvation. “By grace” is actually the first phrase in this sentence for emphasis. It is purely by God’s goodness and giving character that any of us are saved. In 1:7, Paul wrote, “we have redemption through His blood, which brings the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace, which He lavished on us.” Throughout the New Testament, the consistent message is that we are debtors to God’s grace for absolutely everything, including our salvation. None of what we have experienced could have happened on our own. And God did not have to do what He did for us. But He did, solely because of His gracious love, shown in Christ! We need to beware of taking God’s grace for granted and subtly believing that, somehow, we deserve this more than the other guy. We don’t deserve this in any way; it is all of grace.

By this grace, we have been saved (assuming genuine conversion by trusting Christ).

Literally, Paul said “you are in a state of having been saved.” This is stated as a completed, comprehensive action. We know from the rest of the New Testament that our experience of salvation is growing and someday will be fully consummated. But here Paul stressed the settled fact of our salvation. It has definitely been accomplished in Christ by God’s grace. If we have genuinely believed in Jesus, we are no longer dead, but alive. It is a done deal! And we are saved through faith. Faith is the instrument which grace uses to save us. The grammar Paul used distinguishes the role of grace and faith in our salvation. Grace is the cause of our salvation and faith is the instrument. The logical idea of an instrument is something that is used in order to accomplish something else. For instance, if I took a hammer and used it to drive a nail, I would be the cause of the nail going in, but the hammer would be the instrument I used to do it. Theoretically, an instrument may or may not have been necessary (I could have used a nail gun), but it is what was used to accomplish something.

In this case, faith was instrumental in our salvation. It was the means by which we were saved. But it is not the cause of our salvation. Our faith is how we received what God does in us, but it is not what works our salvation. We don’t do anything; we just trust and accept what God has already done on our behalf.

#### 2. The explanation of this fact (8b-9)

##### a This is God’s doing, not ours (8b-9a)

##### 1) This is not from you (8b)

We didn’t do it. We were not the key players in our salvation. We cannot take credit for it. It is somewhat debated, but “this” almost certainly refers to the totality of the salvation, including the grace and the faith

##### 2) It is the gift of God (8c)

This is the contrast and correction to the previous statement. It is not from us, but from God. It is all a gift from God. As we see in Rom 3:24, salvation is given freely as a gift, not because of anything we have done or will do in the future. It is entirely from grace. It is entirely from God.

##### 3) It is not from works (9a)

This again reinforces the contrast between salvation not being our accomplishment but being completely from God. The entire Book of Galatians is a polemic against the idea that works contribute anything to the cause of our salvation. We do not, indeed we cannot, do anything to contribute to our salvation. We were dead. Like Lazarus, we did not make ourselves alive, but we were made alive, without our help being necessary.

##### b The result: So that no one can boast [except God]. (9b)

The result of all this is that no one can boast in their salvation. No one has earned or qualified for salvation any more than anyone else. God alone gets all the glory for our salvation. God will not allow the possibility of any human boasting in His presence about salvation – cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-31 And He purposely designed salvation to exclude the possibility of human credit

**B. The reason: God created us for this (10)**

**1. We are God's workmanship (10a)**

God made us. God planned and created all that we are, including our salvation. Some people make a big deal out of the fact that the word Paul used here is related to the English word "poem," – that somehow, we are God's poem. But the word is related to "poem," it does not mean poem. The English word "poem" came into use long after Paul wrote this, and he did not have it in mind, or any of its connotations. The word Paul used means workmanship or product, something that was made. It can have the connotation of beauty and excellent craftsmanship, but not necessarily. Any idea of the quality of the product comes from fact that God is the producer, not from the word "workmanship." And this word has none of the artsy connotations usually connected with the word "poem."

Paul's point is simply that God is the cause and creator of all that we are.

**2. Explanation of the implications: (10b-d)**

**a We were created in Christ Jesus for good works (10b)**

This is the explanation of what Paul meant by us being God's workmanship. We were created. And we were created (and saved) for a purpose. The purpose for which we were created was not just salvation and the resulting relationship with God (though those are a central part of our purpose). In this verse, Paul highlighted that we were created for the purpose of doing good works, which are the result of our salvation.

Paul had already made it very clear that we are not saved because of good works. We are not saved by our good works. But here, he mentioned that we are saved for good works. Good works do not cause salvation. But our salvation results in good works. Works never produce salvation, but salvation produces transformed people, who produce good works. If we are genuinely saved, and have new life from Christ, we will do good things. We will act out the godly behavior that comes from the godly change in our character by the work of God's Spirit in our lives.

**b These were planned by God (10c-d)**

**1) Which God prepared beforehand (10c)**

All of these good works were planned by God ahead of time. We were created for these works, and these works were prepared for us. We are not able to take credit for these works either, because God prepared them beforehand. And only God can prepare this beforehand, because only God controls everything, -cf. Rom. 9:23

**2) The purpose: that we would walk in them (10d)**

God prepared good works for us with the purpose that we would live them out. Literally, it says that we would "walk in them." Compare this with v. 2 – we used to "walk in transgressions and sins" and now we are to "walk" in good works. Throughout the rest of Ephesians, Paul used that key word "walk" to describe some of the general ways that we are to live out the salvation we have graciously been given.