

# EPHESIANS

Eph 2:1–10 || *But God*

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Pastor Jeremiah Knoop

**NEXT THREE DAYS:** My family doesn't spend a lot of time in front of a television, but every so often we'll watch a movie together; and one of my favorite movies is about a guy who breaks his wife out of prison after she's wrongly convicted for a crime she didn't commit. The movie starts with this really intense scene of a guy driving down some dark alleys in some sketchy neighborhoods in the middle of the night, and it sounds like somebody is dying in the backseat. The producers intentionally started with this scene in order to make the audience wonder what in the world happened to get this guy to this place. Then the movie goes back in time (*three months*) and shows all the events leading up to this moment.

This is kind of what Paul is doing in his letter to the church in Ephesus. He starts by giving us this incredible picture of the church's present relationship with God. They are chosen. Adopted. Accepted. Their eternity is sealed by the Holy Spirit. And the question that we should be asking when we get to the end of chapter one is, "How did they get here?" "What happened in their past that would make the Creator of the universe choose them?" Because God doesn't choose everybody.<sup>1</sup> So, why did God choose **them**? [y 3 = 21] [you (?), God = chosen]

When I hear about somebody being "chosen", I immediately tend to think of their abilities. Like playing basketball in **6<sup>th</sup> grade gym class** when the team captains would choose who they wanted to be on their team. **Who did they choose?** They chose the kids who they thought had the highest level of *athletic ability* – or the kids who were *popular* – or maybe even just those who were more *attractive*. If you didn't have any of these qualities, nobody wanted to choose you. I'll never forget the time that I was the last guy picked for our P.E. basketball game, and as I walked over to my team, one of the upperclassmen sarcastically said, "Well, it looks we got Michael Jordan on our team." 😊 That's why I think of when I hear about somebody being "chosen": you have some kind of quality (*athleticism, personality, looks*) that makes people want you on their team.

And it's not just a middle school thing; **this is the way we operate in almost every sphere of life.**

- One of my sons is in a community musical. How did he get the part? He *auditioned*.
- One of my sons is working at a restaurant. How did he get the job? He *applied*.
- One of my friends was recently accepted into med school. How did she get in? She *passed* an exam.
- This year is election year. How are we going to determine who will be our president? People will *vote*.
- How did I become the lead pastor at North Center? After a year-long internship, the church *voted*.

In our experience, for us to get chosen for something in this life, it almost always comes with an *audition* or an *application* or *tryouts* or a *vote* or passing some kind of *test*. In other words, we show up and do our best, and if it's enough, you get chosen.

Is that how it works when it comes to our relationship with God... like, God looks at our hearts, and if He likes what He sees, then He chooses us to be part of His family? "You have a kind heart; I choose you to be part of My family." "You are faithful in your relationship; I choose you." "You always keep your word; I choose you." Does God look out across the hearts of humanity and put together a **spiritual A-Team** to be His church?

By the time we reach the end of chapter one, the question begging to be asked is, "What *compelled* God to choose these people?"

With that question on our mind, **Paul goes back to the beginning of the story** to show what compelled God to choose them – to adopt them, predestine them, accept them, redeem them, and seal them for eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 22:14; John 6:37–39; 15:16.

Paul begins **chapter 2** by saying that the reason God chose them had absolutely nothing to do with them whatsoever. **What was their life like before God chose them?** Were they kind? Compassionate? Loving? Trustworthy? Faithful? Humble? Hard workers?

No, you... you were dead!

**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...**

*~ Ephesians 2:1*

However we may appear to others on the outside, the Bible tells us that God sees our hearts (**1 Sam 16:7**). And what does He see when He looks at a person's heart who doesn't have a relationship with God? *Death*.

This is how their story starts: they were **dead** in their *trespasses* and in their *sins*.

What do those two words mean?

1. **Trespasses**: when we use the word "trespass", we are usually referring to violating someone's boundaries. You enter a place that you do not own & are not permitted to be. But the word Paul uses here (**παράπτωμα**) isn't describing *land*; it's describing *life*. It's not about violating a certain *property*; it's about violating a certain *person*. It's not about breaking *fences*; it's about breaking *friendships* (Matt 6:14; Mark 11:25). It's about doing something that is wrongfully against someone else.
2. **Sins**: this word (**ἁμαρτία**) is also a relationship word. Bible scholars tells us that it was originally an **archery term** which meant "to miss the mark". You were aiming for the bullseye, but somehow you hit the neighbor's cat instead. Aimed for the laundry basket but hit the ceiling fan. 😊 You missed the mark.

What do these two words have to do with us & our relationship with God?

The Bible tells us that God made us to **glorify** Him – *to see Him, to know Him, to love Him, to enjoy Him, to trust Him* (**Isa 43:7**), but on our own every single one of us is aiming for our own glory instead. This is why, in his letter to the church in Rome, Paul said, "**For all have 'missed the mark' and fall short of the glory of God**" (**Rom 3:23**). We **trespassed** against God's heart by going after other gods (**Exod 20:3**) – chasing after other treasures. This turning away from God started in the Garden of Eden, and it never stopped. Ever since Adam & Eve turned away from God, our hearts have had an affinity toward the darkness (e.g., **John 3:19**).<sup>2</sup>

If God is Light (**1 John 1:5**); what do you call a heart that is away from God? **Dark**.

If God is Life (**John 1:4; 1 John 5:11–12**), what do you call a heart that is outside of God? **Dead**.

This is how every single one of our stories begins: *dead in trespasses and sins*.

**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,  
in which you once walked according to the course of this world,  
according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,  
among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh,  
fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**

*~ Ephesians 2:1–3*

**This is your life before Christ.** Your heart is spiritually dead. Disobedient. Lusting and chasing after things outside of God's heart. Following the course of this world.

I think Paul's imagery of "*following the course of this world*" is so helpful. One of my life goals is to canoe the entire **Mississippi River**. I started the summer after I graduated from high school and made it a couple hundred miles. A couple years later, I picked up where I left off and canoed some more. And then again a couple years after that. If you ever look at a map at the Mississippi, you'll notice that there are lots of rivers that flow into it and lots of rivers that flow out of it.

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<sup>2</sup> "Prone to Wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."

On one of my trips, I accidentally turned onto a different river, and it took me a very long time before I finally realized that I was on the wrong river. The scenery looked the same. The current felt the same. My attitude felt the same. The company in the canoe was the same. From all outward appearances, everything looked the same. The only problem was that the course I was on was leading me somewhere I didn't want to go.

I was sharing the gospel with a guy this week, and this is pretty much exactly how he is experiencing the world right now. He looks at my life and then he looks at his – and on the outside they look pretty much the same: we both have **jobs** that are meaningful to us, **friends** that we care about, **family** that we love, **hobbies** that we enjoy, **goals** that we are pursuing... so **WHY** does he need Jesus – especially considering the fact that he is so successful at everything he does? **Answer:** because the road I'm on leads to everlasting life in the presence of God, and the road he's on leads to everlasting death away from the presence of God. Just because the scenery is the same doesn't mean you are on the same course. The fact that his life looks good on the outside doesn't mean that he's going in the right direction.

He's following "**the course of this world**" – which is the same course that all of us start out on. We all have the rebellious DNA of Adam & Eve flowing through our veins, and so the Bible says that our heart is sinful from the moment we were conceived in our mother's womb.<sup>3</sup> You don't have to teach your children how to sin; they already know how. † We are "**by nature**" children of wrath – just like everybody else in the universe.

So, this brings us back to our original question: *what compelled God to choose these people in Ephesus if they were just as sinful, rebellious, and disobedient as everybody else in the world.* **Verse 3** ends by saying that they were "**just as the others**".

Paul answers that question in verses 4–9, and he begins with the two most beautiful words that a sinful human could ever hear: **BUT GOD**.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with God (by grace you have been saved)  
~ Ephesians 2:4–5

When you hear the word "**and**" (**καὶ**) in a sentence, it usually signals that what comes before is logically connected with what comes after. **For example:** you might say, "The Vikings struggled last season, and they did not make it into the playoffs." That sentence is logical (*for so many reasons*), and so we connect the two statements with the word "**and**".

When you hear the word "**but**" (**δὲ**) in a sentence, it usually means the exact opposite: that what comes after is not logically connected to what came before. **For example:** you might say, "*There is ice on the lake, but we went swimming.*" Or "*We are in the middle of a church service, but I haven't turned my cell phone off.*"

Here in **verse 4**, the sentence starts with "**but**" because there is nothing logical about it at all.

- We were disobedient. **But God...** We were wandering in sin. **But God...**
- We were aiming for our own glory. **But God...** We were children of wrath. **But God...**
- We were dead in trespasses. **But God...**

Maybe you wonder how in the world God could ever love someone like you, and the answer is "**because His love isn't logical.**" It's not about you. It's not about what you've done or how you've lived. It's not about the choices you've made. It's about God.

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<sup>3</sup> Psa 51:5; 58:3; Prov 22:15; Eccl 7:20; Isa 53:6; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:23; 5:12; Eph 2:3; 1 John 1:10.

<sup>4</sup> **Example:** this past week I caught Asher (4) doing something in his room that he knew he wasn't supposed to be doing. As I stand there in the doorway, how does he respond? Does he pretend like he was doing something else? Does he quickly apologize? Does he blame one of his brothers? No. He gets up, walks over to me, and very slowly closes the door on my face – so that he can keep doing what he's doing without his daddy watching.

If Paul had continued his letter by saying “**And God**”, **then** the sentence would have gone something like this: “*You were by nature children of wrath just as the others, and God has condemned you.*” But it begins with “**But God**” because the salvation that comes after has nothing to do with the life that was lived before.

It’s not “you lived a good life, **and** God saved you” (*which is what every other religion teaches*). It’s “you were dead, **but** God made you alive”.

The rest of this passage (4–9) is just a celebration of who this perplexing God is, how He has saved you, and why He has saved you.

- **Who is this God?**
  - He is the God who is rich in mercy? He doesn’t give you what you deserve (**mercy**), and He does that a lot (**rich**).
  - He is the God who has loved you w/ His great love – even when your heart was dead to Him.<sup>5</sup>
  - He is the God who made you alive, raised you up, and gave you a seat with Christ over the kingdoms of this world.<sup>6</sup>
- **How has He saved you?**
  - By giving you **grace** when you deserved wrath.
  - By giving you **faith** when your heart was dead to Him.
  - By **doing absolutely everything** (“*not of works*”).<sup>7</sup>
  - By bringing you into a **community** of saved people (“*together*”).
- **Why has He saved you?**
  - So that your life might be an everlasting testimony to the sovereign kindness of God.

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus  
~ *Ephesians 2:7*

God means for the entire universe to see – for all the ages to come – how great is His kindness toward us in Christ. You may be the chief of sinners, “*but God*” changes everything.

### Closing Question:

**Q.** So, what do we do with a message like this?

**A.** Paul answers that question in **verse 10**: instead of walking according to the course of this world – like you did when your heart was dead to God, walk in the good works that God prepared for you.

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us what happens when people see good works flowing from a heart that treasures God. Do you remember what He said? He said, “*Let your light so shine before men **that** they may see your **good works** and **glorify** your Father who is in heaven*” (**Matt 5:16**).

Good works *point* people to the God who saves. Good works don’t *produce* our salvation,<sup>8</sup> but they do *point* to our salvation – which causes people to look at God – which is why He saved you in the first place! You get the joy of being saved; He gets all the glory for saving you.

### Respond:

1. Ask God to overwhelm you with the depths of His kindness toward you in Christ.
2. Ask for grace and strength to walk in the good works that He has already prepared for you today.

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<sup>5</sup> Rom 5:8.

<sup>6</sup> Rom 8:16–18; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 1:6.

<sup>7</sup> Your number in the **equation** (**y 3 = 21**) isn’t 7; it’s negative 10,000 trillion; “but God”.

<sup>8</sup> They don’t earn it. They don’t encourage it. They don’t solicit it. They don’t secure it. They don’t maintain it.