

# The Gracious Work Of Our Salvation

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Pastor Ryan Howell / Midweek Study

Special Messages / Ephesians 2:1–10

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Please turn in your Bibles to [Ephesians 2](#). I have entitled my message for this evening, “The Gracious Work Of Our Salvation”. Let’s go ahead and read the first ten verses of [Ephesians 2](#) and we will begin.

**Ephesians 2:1–10 NKJV**

**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.**

**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 Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

[OPEN IN PRAYER]

I want to ask you guys a question: What is your favorite book of the Bible?

First and foremost, all Scripture is a treasure to us. All 66 of these books have been inspired by God and preserved by God for us today. All Scripture is wonderful, but there are those books that resonate with us on a deeper level than others do. My answer to this question changes based on the season of life that I’m in. What I do find is a constant though, I always end up finding my way back to the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians is a unique epistle in that it was not written because an issue or some form of heresy arose in the Ephesian church. This letter was written to explain and teach the great doctrines of our faith as well as to teach us how to live out our salvation. I personally love this book because it is so incredibly rich in its doctrinal instruction and practical application.

The verses which we just read and will study tonight, is one of my absolute favorite sections of Scripture throughout the Bible because it so accurately, simply, and thoroughly states the narrative of the Bible as a whole. That is to say that it accurately, simply, and thoroughly declares to us the gospel (or good news).

I find myself coming back to the gospel again and again and my amazement at it's message has never gone away. There is a temptation to become falsely familiar with the gospel in that we have a lot of head knowledge about what the gospel says and how salvation works, but it stops serving as a truth which brings about meaningful action that leads to change in our lives. These ten verses give us such an accurate and simple view of The Gracious Work Of Our Salvation.

These ten verses can be divided up into three sections:

1. Sin's Work Against Us
2. God's Work For Us
3. God's Work In Us

These three aspects encompass the need, accomplishment, and effect of our salvation. Beginning in Verse 1, we'll look at Sin's Work Against Us.

### **Ephesians 2:1-3 NKJV**

**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.***

In Paul's demonstration of Sin's Work Against Us in Verses 1 through 3, he identifies 4 characteristics of natural sinful man apart from Christ. This was our spiritual reality when we were apart from Christ, and this is the present spiritual reality for those that have not yet come to Christ.

Our first characteristic of fallen man is found in Verse 1; He is spiritually dead.

The thing which causes a man to be spiritually dead is his sin. The Bible is very plain about what the wages of sin are, and that is death. God's warning to Adam & Eve in the garden regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that in the day they ate of it, they would surely die. While the end result of certain sins can be physical death, the Bible is speaking here about spiritual death. When the Bible speaks of death in the spiritual sense, it speaks of separation from God. Because God is perfectly holy and righteous, He cannot have fellowship with sin and unrighteousness. So, when we carry the burden of unrepentant sin upon us, we are separated from God meaning that we are spiritually dead. When we are dead in our sins, spiritual life is absent from us and we can do nothing of ourselves to please God.

Sometimes, we need to be reminded exactly where we began so we can truly appreciate how far we have come. We'll talk about this more in later verses, but what does Verse 1 say about those of us who were dead

in our trespasses in sins? **He** made us **alive**. This is no small feat. The fact that we have been brought from death into life is a miracle. This is a wonderful work that God has done and a work that could never have accomplished ourselves.

The second characteristic of fallen man is found in Verse 2 and the beginning of Verse 3; He is naturally disobedient.

Spiritual death becomes present when disobedience to God's Word occurs. Remember that the lie of Satan in the garden was an alternate path that was contrary to the word that God had already spoken. "You won't die, you'll actually be just like Him!". Adam & Eve's deliberate choice to go outside the boundaries of God's spoken word was the sin which brought about the spiritual death.

Paul says that when we were dead in our sins, we:

1. Walked according to the course of this world.
2. Walked according to the price of the power of the air.
3. Conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh.

We see here that there are three things which influence us toward sin. The world, the devil, and the flesh. The first two go hand in hand because the world-system is influenced by the devil, but both of these are outside of ourselves. We also have a naturally sinful flesh, or sinful nature, which causes us to be disobedient to God.

The world and culture which we live in constantly pushes us toward sin. You see this in the hyper-sexualization of advertisements and media because the statement that "sex sells" continues to be proven true. The world perpetuates the idea to us that we need to be independent and self-sufficient. That is just pride. The world continues to moralize things which God has clearly condemned as evil.

I'm sure you saw it in the news earlier this week, but it is now law in the state of Massachusetts to abort a baby at any point from conception to full term delivery. You can now legally murder a baby which has a beating heart and neurological function and they call it "healthcare". Once the bill was signed, there were probably 10 people in that camera shot that were smiling and happy and clapping. I truly believe that they feel as though they were accomplishing some kind of moral good for women, but because we are spiritually dead, our best attempts at morality are still utterly wicked and in this particular case, we greatly miss the mark.

We're shown that we can be faced with temptation directly from our enemy. Jesus Himself was tempted directly by Satan before He began His public ministry. Satan and his demons can directly tempt you too.

Finally, there's our own sinful nature which pushes us toward sin. In our house when I was growing up, we had cats. My family currently has two dogs. I have observed that dogs and cats tend to act very differently. When I get home from work, there is no one in the world more happy to see me than my dog. Even when I leave the house for fifteen minutes, they act as though I've been gone for fifteen years. You don't really see

that same enthusiasm in cats. You get home and you kind of feel like they wish you stayed gone. That is, until you start putting the food out of course. Point being, dogs act like dogs because they are born with the inherent nature of a dog. Cats act like cats because they are born with the inherent nature of a cat. Unfortunately for us, we are born with a sinful nature so we behave like sinful creatures. There have been many times I was frustrated because of the sin of unbelievers in my life which affected me, but what can I expect from someone who is influenced toward sin at every turn and doesn't have the heavenly power necessary to be victorious?

Continuing in Verse 3 we see the third characteristic of fallen man; He is naturally wicked.

Very simply put, we are sinful people because we like sinful things. In the book 'Confessions' written by St. Augustine, Augustine tells the story of when he and his friends stole pears from a fruit tree outside his family's home as a boy. His parents had explicitly told him not to pick the pears off that tree. He didn't need them because they had fresh pears inside the house. They also were not fully ripe yet so they were actually going to taste worse than the pears they already had in the house.

Augustine said this about the incident:

"We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart—which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself."

Sometimes, the very command to abstain from something is what plants the desire for it in us, and that is unfortunately our sinful nature at work.

Finally, in the last part of Verse 3 we find the fourth characteristic of fallen man; He is utterly condemned.

The Bible says that our sin put us at enmity with God. Meaning that we were enemies with God. Because God is also just, sin cannot go unpunished. The punishment for that sin, obviously, is eternity spent in hell.

These three verses show us man's part in the gracious work of our salvation. We don't contribute anything to our salvation except our sin which establishes the need for saving in the first place. Even our best attempts at righteousness are skewed and influenced by our own fallenness, so we truly have nothing to offer God except the sin which caused Jesus to go to the cross.

Thankfully, this is not the end of man's story. In Verse 4 we read:

**Ephesians 2:4 NKJV**

**But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,**

The first aspect of God's work in our salvation; He loved us.

Two of my favorite words in the English language when they are put together; “But God”. We were spiritually dead. We were naturally disobedient. We were naturally wicked. We were utterly condemned. **But God.** In Verses 4 through 9, we see the work of God in our salvation. Here if Verse 4 we see the first aspect of that work: He loved us. This word of course which is translated as love is ‘agape’. The perfect, selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love of God toward us. Agape love is the very core of who God is. [1 John 4:8](#) simply tells us, God is love. The gracious work of our salvation begins with the perfect, unending, agape love of God. It’s important that you understand that God’s perfect, unending, agape love isn’t only applied to us collectively, but also to you individually. The love story that is the message of the gospel is a story and demonstration of how much God loves you individually.

The Lord has ministered to my own heart how unique and irreplaceable His love for me is. I know I’m loved by my spouse. I know I’m loved by my children. I know I’m loved by my family. I know I’m loved by my friends. But I also know for a fact that no one will ever love me the same way that God loves me. No one will ever love you the same way that God loves you.

One of my all time favorite worship songs is a song called “How He Loves”. It’s a song about nothing other than how much God loves us. Truthfully, I get a little teary eyed when we sing that song because I’m singing about a love which I have done nothing to earn or deserve. When I take an honest view of myself, I have to acknowledge that I’m not very easy to love. I’ve been unfaithful to God. I’ve chased after things other than Him. I’ve looked for fulfillment in things other than Him. At times, I’ve outright turned my back on Him. Yet none of those things made Him love me any less.

The work which Jesus accomplished on the cross is the greatest demonstration of love in human history. On Calvary’s cross, God displayed His hatred for sin and His unending love for the sinner. We cannot fully comprehend the scope and breadth of God’s love on this side of eternity, but we can see this intrinsic attribute of God all throughout His Word. It is simply who He is. What a reason we have to rejoice that the God we serve is like this.

In addition to being a demonstration of God’s love toward us, the work on the cross is also a demonstration of God’s mercy and grace toward us. Grace is the unmerited favor of God extended to us. It is what we could not ever deserve. Conversely, mercy is the exemption of receiving what we truly deserve. On his own, a sinner deserves only the wrath of God because of his sin. Thankfully, we’re not on our own in this. God loves us. God is merciful and gracious toward us. This is His very nature. And so, this gift of salvation can be summarized like this. The gracious work of God accomplished on the cross, motivated by the great love of God, covers us with the everlasting mercy of God.

In Verse 5, we see the second aspect of God’s work in our salvation; He made us alive.

**Ephesians 2:5 NKJV**

**even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

Man, what a wonderful truth. As believers, here is the truth for you and me. We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins but we have now been made alive, we are resurrected with Christ. The first three verses showed us the characteristics of fallen man, but notice how Paul explained those characteristics in the context of writing to people who are already believers. Those attributes are all in the past tense. You *were* dead in trespasses and sins. You *once walked* according to the course of this world, we *once conducted* ourselves in the lust of our flesh, we *were* by nature children of wrath. These things were once true about you and I, but because of God, these things are no longer! We see this all throughout the New Testament:

## **2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV**

**Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

## **Romans 6:4–11 NKJV**

**Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

## **Galatians 2:20 NKJV**

**I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

## **Ephesians 4:17–24 NKJV**

**This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**

Here is an important truth about your identity. If you have repented from your sin, if you have believed upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit as a result, you are a **new creation**. **Who you were before Christ died with Christ and now you live a new life with Christ all**

**because of the finished work of Christ.** It does not matter what anyone in this world says about you. It does not matter what Satan says about you. The only thing that matters is what God says about you and God says you are a new creation in Christ created in true righteousness and holiness.

In the gospels, we read about three instances where Jesus physically raised people from the dead. There is the son of a widow that we read about in [Luke 7](#). There is Jairus' daughter that we read about in [Luke 8](#). And finally, there is Lazarus that we read about in [John 11](#). In all three of these resurrections, there is one commonality. Jesus spoke a word, and they were raised from the dead. Jesus said to the widow's son, "Young man, I say to you, arise", and the young man sat up and started talking. Jesus said to Jairus' daughter, "Little girl, arise", and her spirit returned and she arose immediately. Jesus said to Lazarus while he was in the tomb, "Lazarus, come forth!", and he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. I say that to say this: All it takes for Jesus to grant resurrection life to someone is to simply speak it and the power of God's Spirit works to complete it. God has given you resurrection life. I can say that, because He said so. If we will believe the Word of God which says, "You have been given new life", then the Spirit of God will work out the new and resurrected life in you.

The third aspect of God's work in our salvation that we find in Verse 6; He has exalted us.

#### **Ephesians 2:6 NKJV**

**and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

As if the newness of life granted to us by salvation wasn't enough, our salvation also exalts us into the heavenly places where Christ deserves to be. In [Revelation 21](#), John tells us about a new heaven and a new earth. In that new earth, Jesus will rule and reign for 1,000 years before Satan is ultimately defeated and cast into the lake of fire. The scroll which is opened is the title deed to the earth and Jesus is the only One worthy to open the scroll because He is the only One that truly paid the price for it. Because of what Jesus has done, you and I get to rule and reign in that new earth with Him. The Bible says that He has made us kings and priests unto Himself. That is an office that none of us could qualify for unless we were covered and washed by the blood of Jesus.

#### **Romans 8:16–17 NKJV**

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.**

What an act of grace it is that you and I get to partake in the inheritance that rightly belongs to Jesus. Truthfully, I can't even begin to fathom what it means to be a joint heir with Christ, but I know it's gonna be awesome.

Looking at this work of exaltation by God in our salvation. We started this chapter utterly dead in our sin. We were helpless to the forces that push us toward sin. We had no ability to please God in and of ourselves. Because of this, we were children of wrath. But God is loving. God is gracious. God is merciful. These things



we could never know if God had not revealed them to us. Yet, because of His love, grace, and mercy toward us, He has taken from the lowest of the low and exalted us to highest place we could ever be and that is with Christ. Look what the power of God is able to do for you and I.

I pray you'd understand that you're not just some average Joe to God. You are His child. He says you are joint heir with Christ. He has exalted you and made you sit in the heavenly places in Christ. I don't know about you, but I can't wait to leave this temporal world and step into the eternal blessings that God has promised me. The riches of His presence. The experience of being free from our sinful nature which puts us in direct opposition to the God we love. That's is the living hope that is within us.

### **1 Peter 1:3 NKJV**

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**

This living hope which sustains us until the Lord calls us home or until He returns to come get us, all made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So far, the three aspects of God's Work In Our Salvation. He loves. He makes alive. He exalts. And finally, He glorifies Himself through us.

### **Ephesians 2:7 NKJV**

**that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

I love how the New Living Translation puts this verse. It says Verse 7 like this: **So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. Here's another critically important part of your identity as a believer.** You are a walking, talking, living, breath testimony of God's love, grace, and mercy for His children. The only correct response of the believer when he considers all the God has done for him in this work of salvation, is to dedicate all that he is to praise, glorify, and magnify the name of Jesus Christ. You and I are the proof that God exists. You and I are the proof that God is mighty to save. You and I are the proof that God loves. You and I are the proof that God is gracious. You and I are the proof that God is merciful. God has bestowed upon us such a high calling to serve as a testimony of the riches of His love, grace, and mercy.

Knowing this, there are two sections of Scripture that come to mind. First is [Ephesians 4:1](#).

### **Ephesians 4:1 NKJV**

**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,**

When we as believers revert back to the patterns and behaviors of who we were before Christ, we attempt to walk in the spirit of a dead man. There is no time to be walking in the spirit of dead men. Now is the time to live out the new and abundant life Jesus gives us established on the foundation of His finished work. So



walk worthy of this calling! Going hand in hand with this exhortation, I'm reminded of the words of Jesus in [Matthew 5:14-16](#).

#### **Matthew 5:14–16 NKJV**

**“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are in the house*. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

The testimony of your salvation and the transformation power of God at work in your life is a bright and shining light that we have been called to go out into the world and shine before men. Jesus has set you on that hill. Don't try to cover it up! When we present ourselves to the world around us that is perishing, God is the one that receives the glory.

In telling my own testimony, I used to harp so much on what I had done. All of my focus was on the first three verses and so I neglected to accurately testify of God's work. Let everything about who we are be about what God has done, not what we have done. He is worthy of that glory and we should not be the ones keeping it from Him.

And finally, we come to Verses 8 & 9 which sum up the gospel so well:

#### **Ephesians 2:8–9 NKJV**

**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.***

Here's the simple message of the gospel. We who were once dead in our sin, helpless to the dominion of sin in our lives, under the wrath of God, have been saved by an act of grace. We have been made alive, we have been made new creations in Christ, we have been made to sit in the heavenly places with Christ, and we now serve as the greatest testimony of God's great grace, rich mercy, and great love. The best part about it, it had nothing to do with us. Like I said, salvation is all about what God has done. If we did have anything to contribute to it, we would certainly attempt to take all the glory for it. All we have to do to receive this gift is to receive it in faith.

#### **Romans 10:9 NKJV**

**If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Since I came to faith in Christ, I can see the work of sanctification that God is doing in my heart. Thank God that I'm not where I once was, but may I never forget that I'm not yet where I want to be. I'm excited to see what God will accomplish in me over the next 10, 20, 30 years of walking with Him, but that will be all be done because my life is being built upon the sure foundation of the gospel message. We will never outgrow the simplicity and the impact of the gospel, but it is that wonderful truth that sustains us and perfects us.

I do not know why the Lord has led me to share out of this passage of Scripture this evening. I'd certainly teach out of this if I knew there were likely going to be a lot of unsaved people in the audience, but I do not know what God's purpose is the sharing of this message tonight. But I have to say to anyone listening to the sound of my voice, whether they be in this room or listening online, if you have never confessed with your mouth and believed in your heart the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, let today be the day of salvation. Let today be the day you become aware of how loved you are by God. Let today be the day you are made alive. Let today be the day that you are made to sit in the heavenly places with Christ. Let today be the day you begin serving as a testimony of the riches of God's love, grace, and mercy. Let today be the day you say, "I have been saved by grace through faith. Not because of myself, but because God freely gave this gift to me". I don't know who that word is for, but it's for someone.

**[IF TIME AVAILABLE GO TO VERSE 10]**

Lastly, God's work is not yet finished because Verse 10 tells us that God continues to work in us and through us.

**Ephesians 2:10 NKJV**

**For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

The Greek work which is translated as 'workmanship' is poiema which is the word we derive our English word poem from. Our conversion is not the be all end all, it is the beginning of a lifelong great work of God in us. Now that the work of the cross is completed, God continues in the work of perfecting His church. Molding, shaping, and conforming us into the image of Christ and in this He continues to work in us. Warren Wiersbe said it like this:

"At great expense to Himself, God worked for us on the cross. And today, on the basis of that price paid on Calvary's cross, He is working in us to conform us to Christ. God cannot work in us unless He has first worked for us, and we have trusted His Son. Also, He cannot work through us unless He has worked in us.

The tools God uses to work in us:

1. The Word Of God
2. The Act Of Prayer
3. The Power Of The Holy Spirit
4. Suffering

As God works in you, He will work through you. All this leading to the day that we are presented to Him as His bride. Sanctified, holy, and blameless. Ready to spend eternity with Him.