

By Nature vs. By Grace

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[0 : 0 0] So, you already have your Bibles turned to Ephesians? If not, now is the time to turn there.

Well, this morning, we will be in Ephesians 2, and specifically in verses 1 through 10 of chapter 2. The title of my message is, By Nature vs. By Grace.

Hopefully, it's not too cryptic, but by the end of the sermon, hopefully this will make sense that I title this sermon, By Nature and By Grace. Now, this is perhaps one of the greatest sections in the Bible about salvation.

So, there's little doubt that perhaps it, and perhaps the whole book of Ephesians, is familiar to many of you, and perhaps it's a much-studied and a much-loved book by you.

Also, for those of you who have been following and working on our monthly Scripture memory assignments, right? At least, I've got to put a plug in there, right? At least since July, when we started memorizing Ephesians chapter 2.

[1 : 1 7] Hopefully, you've been memorizing through that, and that this is a little bit familiar. So, this is my prayer for us this morning, as we sit under God's Word.

It's threefold in my prayer. First of all, for those of you who are familiar with this and are born-again believers, I just pray that you're refreshed and you're encouraged by the reminder of these wonderful truths of salvation, right?

You can just sit there and just bask in God's truth and pray you'll be refreshed and encouraged. We have to be reminded, right? We are such a forgetful people. We're so distracted, and we just forget the simple truths of lives.

So, if you're familiar with this Scripture, was it last year? The ladies walked through the whole book of Ephesians. So, especially you all, if you've studied Ephesians recently, you're familiar with this, and you're a born-again believer, just be refreshed.

Not by what I say, but what Scripture teaches us in Ephesians 2. For those of you who are not studied in this particular passage, but are believers, I pray that you'll gain a better understanding and appreciation.

[2 : 2 3] of what Paul writes in Ephesians 2. And lastly, if anyone here is not a believer, and whether it be someone sitting in this room this morning or perhaps later listening to a recording of this sermon, my prayer for you is that today would be the day of your salvation.

That as we open God's Word and as we read from it, that you would learn the truth of the human condition apart from Christ. And what God the Father has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ, in a way of rescue from that condition.

That's my prayer for you if you do not know Christ. So, with that, let me pray, and then we'll dive into Ephesians 2. So, Father, again, we pause before you, praying, Lord, that your Word would open eyes and hearts and minds and ears, Father, that for those of us who you call your children, that we would praise you and worship you and honor you for these truths.

And for those who do not know you, that are right now in the sound of this sermon, this message, Father, that you would open eyes, that it would be a day of salvation for them, Father.

Lord, I also pray that just as Jeff and I pray before we step into the pulpit, Lord, we pray that you would just move us this morning, move me out of the way, Father. Lord, I don't want to share my opinions, my thoughts, my perspectives on things.

[3 : 54] Lord, I want to honor you, and I want to share what your truth has for us this morning. So, move me out of the way that you would be glorified. In Christ's name, amen. All right, so if we're good Bible students, and now, again, if you're visiting for the first time, so Jeff has been walking through a verse-by-verse exposition of Genesis, right?

So, we're in chapter 1, and it turns out that he's been doing a sermon a day, right? That wasn't his plan, but that's how the Lord has led him to pace himself. One sermon for each day of creation.

So, today, this is sort of a one-off, right? We haven't been walking through the book of Ephesians, right? So, it's imperative that I sort of make sure we understand the context, right?

That we don't take Ephesians 2 out of context and perhaps misinterpret or misunderstand what Paul says. And so, again, that was part of the reason why we read through Ephesians 1 in our call to worship.

So, we're aware in Ephesians 1, the context leading up to Ephesians 2, that Paul opens his letter by exalting and praising God for all the spiritual blessings that the faithful saints, that's what he calls them, the faithful saints, the believers in Jesus Christ in Ephesus, that they've received in Christ.

[5 : 10] And what are those? I want to recite those one more time. We read through them. I prayed them back. But repetition's good, right? It reminds us. So, let me just go through, recite what those blessings are, those spiritual blessings are.

Verse 4, He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Verse 5, in love He predestined us. Verse 6, He blessed us in the Beloved, the Beloved being Jesus Christ.

Verse 7, He redeemed us in Him. Verse 9, He made known to us the mystery of His will. Verse 11, He has given us inheritance. Verse 13, He has sealed us with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of that inheritance.

Those are the spiritual blessings that Paul starts out his letter to the church in Ephesus. And why did he do all those things? Why did God bless them with all these spiritual blessings?

Well, again, we read in Ephesians 1, verse 5, He did it according to the purpose of His will. Verse 7, according to the riches of His grace. Verses 9 and 11, again, according to His purpose.

[6 : 15] And also in verse 11, according to the counsel of His will. And so, Paul, being so overwhelmed, perhaps, at all that God has done, and then because of what he, Paul, has heard regarding the Ephesians' great faith in the Lord Jesus, Paul takes the remainder of chapter 1, verses 15 through 23.

He takes the remaining part of that to tell them how he himself prays for the believers in Ephesus. And let me read that just one more time because it sets the stage for Ephesians 2.

So, just verse 16 through 19, let me read that again. Paul writes, Why? That you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, What are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints?

And what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe? Paul is praying, he's sharing that prayer via this letter to the Ephesian church, that they would understand what God has done for them, that they would truly grasp what it means to be in Christ, to be a part of His eternal plan, to be chosen, to be redeemed, to be saved, and to be granted an inheritance with God.

So this sets the stage for chapter 2 as we look at that this morning. Actually, it sets the stage for the rest of the book of Ephesians, right? Chapters 2 through 6. I didn't think you were willing to sit here all day and go through chapters 2 through 6, right?

[8 : 08] So we'll do just the first 10. I don't think I have the time to prepare, but we will be looking at the first 10 verses of Ephesians 2. So let me read that to you.

Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 10. And so Paul continues, Verse 4, For by grace, Well, verses 1, 2, and 3 describe our human condition or our nature.

Now, before we look at these three verses in detail, I want to make sure and be clear that what Paul describes here in these first three verses, that they apply to everyone apart from Christ, right?

That is, these verses aren't describing someone who's in some isolated, heathen, pagan, uncivilized tribe somewhere, right? This is the biblical diagnosis of all fallen men everywhere.

[10 : 18] Well, you may ask, well, hey, in verse 1, Paul does use the word you. You were dead. So perhaps this is just for the Ephesian church. Well, it does indicate, as he's writing in verse 1, The you does indicate the Gentile readers in Ephesus and those in the surrounding areas.

But keep reading, right? If we notice in verse 3, what's he say? He says that we all. So he addresses first the Ephesians, the Gentiles in general, we all.

Now he includes himself and all the Jews in that as well. But then at the end of verse 3, then he has the phrase, the rest of mankind. So what Paul describes in these three verses is the universal human condition.

It's basically Romans 1 through 3, right? It's basically Romans chapters 1 through 3 condensed into three verses, Ephesians 2, 1, 2, and 3.

And for those of you familiar with the first three chapters in Romans, Paul argues his case for sin and guilt, first for the pagans, then of the Jews, then of all mankind.

[11 : 29] So see how it parallels these three verses here. Again, it's the condition of all humans apart from Christ. These three verses, verses 1, 2, and 3. Paul highlights three aspects of our human condition apart from salvation in Christ.

So that's sort of how I'm going to organize my thoughts here in the first three verses, that he highlights three aspects of the human condition. And the first aspect is that we are, sorry, this is bad news, but we are dead, right?

That's what Paul writes. Folks, the bottom line here is that we were dead before Christ saved us.

Dead physically? Well, no. No, we're alive physically. We live on earth for a time. But dead spiritually? Yes, that's what Paul's referring to. I think you know that. Dead spiritually.

Well, what's it mean to be spiritually dead? Well, if we turn a few pages over to Ephesians 4.18, one way that Paul describes it in verse 18 of chapter 4, it's as being alienated from the life of God.

[12 : 47] Being spiritually dead means that you're spiritually separate. You're alienated from the life of God. And when you're alienated from God, when you're spiritually separated from God, you become ignorant of God's truth.

And that results in you being not just spiritually dead, but being in spiritual darkness. Spiritual blind. Spiritually dead. And that's what Christ saved us from, right?

Spiritual death. Another way to understand spiritual death is to understand physical death, right? So when someone's physically dead, they cannot respond to stimulus, right?

Death is an inability to respond. Likewise, when you're spiritually dead, you have a complete inability to do anything or to respond to anything, to reanimate you, to make you come to life.

It's as if you're a zombie. And yes, I somehow worked the term zombie into a sermon, right? It's like you're a zombie. It's like you're on earth. It's like you're a dead man walking.

[13 : 57] While on earth, as an unbeliever, you're physically alive, but you're spiritually dead. That's what Paul says. If you're a Christian, remember, this is your past.

But if you're not a Christian, this is indeed your present. So what are you thinking? Perhaps you're thinking, now wait a minute, Greg.

This doesn't jive with what I see and observe day to day. I know lots of nonbelievers who appear to be living quite well and thriving and prospering, right? I know nonbelievers who are good people.

They're good people, Greg. They donate. They give them their money. They give them their time. They support worthy causes. They're nice. And they're thoughtful. They're moral. They seem morally good.

Are they dead, spiritually dead? Perhaps in a private moment of total honesty, you might confess that it was sort of hard to believe that you were truly spiritually dead before becoming a Christian.

[15 : 04] I mean, after all, you were a good kid growing up. You didn't fight. You made good grades in school. You didn't curse. You were respectful.

And you were overall obedient to your parents. So, perhaps being totally honest with yourself, you're just not sure that you were really spiritually dead.

The reason I'm mentioning that is because as I look around our church family and as I was thinking, preparing for the sermon, especially the younger folks here, those that are 5, 10, 15, 20 years old, we've got a great group of kids here.

You families, you mom and dads have done a phenomenal job. And some of you I know more than others, but we have good kids here. But I also sort of wonder if in that perceived goodness, if our kids really understand that if they're not saved, that they're still spiritually dead.

That's why I bring this up. Well, let's look at, again, verses 1 and 2 to see how Paul describes that deadness. Paul writes, So Paul uses that phrase, trespasses and sins.

[16 : 23] It's somewhat like two ways of looking at the same thing, two sides of the coin, the same coin. In Greek, the word trespass means to take a false step, to slip or to fall or to go the wrong direction.

You've actively done something wrong. That's trespass. The Greek word for sin more communicates the idea of missing the mark, a falling short of a standard.

It's in this context that it's in the context of how it's used in this verse. It's the missing of God's target. So if sin is falling short of something or missing God's target, then what is God's target?

What's God's target? Romans 3.23 tells us, For all have sinned, and what happened? And fall short of what? The glory of God. Sin is a failure to glorify God.

It's a missing of the mark of God's glory. That's the sense in which the word sin is used here. Romans 1.21, Sin is coming short of glorifying God.

[17 : 41] So when we say that someone is a sinner, what we're not saying is that he and other sinners are at the same level of sinfulness, right?

That they're vile, rotten, degraded, corrupted, decaying sinners. Right? All are spiritually dead in their sin, but all are not in the same level of decaying, if you would.

To put it another way, sin is not a question of the amount of decay, but it's the falling short of something. In a sermon by John MacArthur back in the 1970s, he commented, and I remember this because it made such an impression on me when, now I didn't hear this in the 70s, he preached this in the 70s, but it stuck with me when I heard what he said.

He says, Sin has more to do with what you don't do than what you do do. Does that make sense? I mean, he's not excluding the trespasses, the sort of act of the sins of commission, right?

He's not excluding that. But he says when you get down to it, sin has more to do with what you don't do than you do do. Sin is what you fail to do.

[19 : 00] That you fail to come to the glory of God. That you fall short of his perfection. Matthew 5, 48, be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

1 Peter 1, 16, be holy as I am holy. Glory, perfection, holiness, that's the target.

And that's where we fall short. We fail because we miss that target in our sinfulness, in our lack of belief. All right, let me try to illustrate this one more way because I think this is important.

I want to camp out on here in just a minute because I'm convinced that sometimes folks don't have the right theology because they don't have the right starting point. They don't understand the deadness that we are in apart from Christ.

So I want to illustrate a point. And I did also borrow this from John MacArthur, but I've adapted it for our context, our situation. That's living on the East Coast.

[20 : 01] So think about this. We're all going to leave right now. We're going to jump in our cars. We're going to drive down to Virginia Beach. Okay? We're going to get out of our cars.

We're going to line up on the shoreline. And we're going to have a jump off to see who can jump from Virginia Beach across the Atlantic Ocean to Chipona, Spain.

Anybody know Chipona, Spain? Thank you. Chipona, Spain. It's in southwest Spain, right? Chipona, Spain. Now, listen. I got Google Earth. I got on Google Earth this week.

And I longitudinally followed due east, right? So if you're standing on the coast of Virginia Beach and you just look east and you go around the curvature of the earth, you're going to land in southwest Spain right around Chipona, Spain.

All right? So we're going to have a jump off. All right? Now, you can have a running start if you want. You can do just a standing long jump. You can go barefoot.

[20 : 59] You can put your Air Jordans on. It doesn't matter, right? We're going to have a jump off. We're going to see who can jump from Virginia Beach to Chipona, Spain. What's going to happen?

All right? Well, we all will end up at different levels in the water, right? Some of us may get an inch or two. You're right into the water. Some of us, you know, have our toes sort of covered in water.

Some of us have our feet covered in the water. Hey, some of us may have a running start, right? Some of you athletes may back way up and run, run, run, and jump. And then you may get into water up to your ankles. But none of us, no one is going to come close to hitting the target of Chipona, Spain.

All right? Well, with that picture in mind, the same thing is true spiritually. Right? There are different levels of attainment in human life. There's different levels of morality and so forth.

Right? But nobody gets to the glory of God. Nobody gets to perfection. And nobody gets to holiness. We all fall short of the glory of God.

[22 : 08] But Greg, I'm a good person. I'm a good dad. I love my kids. I take care of my kids. I serve others. And this is good. But Luke 6.33 says, And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same. Jesus says sinners do good to each other. That's right. People do good to each other. But Jesus said people who do good to each other and are relatively good, relatively moral, what's he call them?

They're still sinners. He calls them sinners. The point is being relatively good isn't the issue. Being a good dad, a good wife, a good child, a good neighbor, a good parent, a good student, that's really not the issue.

The issue is the glory of God. An unbeliever does not live to the glory of God. An unbeliever is not perfect.

An unbeliever is not holy. Why? The cause of his sin. And no matter what else he does, how good or kind or generous or moral that he thinks he is, he's just ankle deep in the sea, to use that illustration, an impossibly long way from the goal, the target of God's glory, of His perfection, and of His holiness.

[23 : 39] See, man is dead in his trespasses and sins, as Paul writes. He's an inability to reach God's standard.

He's a dead man walking, right? He's a zombie. Well, Paul is not content to simply say that before Christ we walked or death walked in trespasses and sins.

He then reveals the bondage that we were in in the next verse. This is the second aspect of the human condition, apart from the salvation of Christ. So we were dead in our sins and trespasses, and then we were enslaved.

We were in bondage. See, if death lies behind sin, as we've just looked at, then what lies behind sin that holds us in such captivity?

What is it? Well, Paul provides the answers in verses 2 and 3. We're enslaved to the world, we're enslaved to the devil, and we're enslaved to the flesh.

[24 : 42] So again, if you look at your scripture, chapter 2, verse 2, it says here, we were following the course of this world. All right, this doesn't necessarily refer to the physical world, but more to the ideology of our age.

Society organized without reference to God. The world system, the system of Satan. The world system permeates, indeed dominates, non-Christian society and holds people in captivity.

I think you would agree with that. And what is the ideology of our age? Well, just look around, right? That's an easy puffball question to you all, right? Some of the things that come to my mind, ideology of the age, the thoughts of the age, materialism.

All right, I've got to have it. Keep up with the Joneses. I can't get enough. I'm never truly satisfied. I always need, or think I need, more and more and more.

More money, more stuff. Materialism. That's one ideology of the age. Another one, humanism. Right, it's all about you. You can do anything. Follow your heart.

[25 : 57] Everything is you, you, you, or me, me, me. Right, materialism. Or, I'm sorry, humanism. Human-centered. It's all about me. We idolize me.

Immorality is another one. I don't know if that's an ideology, but it's certainly part of what we see in society today. Right? Everything seems hyper-sexualized. Right? There's no modesty. Little respect for the body.

Self-expression is king. Little respect for biblical marriage. Casual sex. And let's call it like the Bible calls it. Fornication and adultery. Homosexuality.

Right? Our society is full of these ideological thoughts in terms of immorality. We can throw in evil in there as well. Disregard for human life.

Abortion. Shootings. Terrorism. That's the most recent thing on the news. Right? We're enslaved to this world.

[26 : 56] And here's an issue that compounds things. And I think I'll make an amen out of this one. I'm not sure. But here's an issue that compounds this. People in general tend not to have a mind of their own, but tend to surrender to the pop culture of television, social media, and influencers.

And in their surrender, they become bondage to their culture. What do you think? See that? And because unbelievers are spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins, and therefore alienated from God and truth, they are enslaved, and as Scripture says here, they follow the course of the world.

We were all the same. We drifted along the stream of the world's ideas of living until Jesus liberated us.

Right? Well, who's behind the course of this world? Paul tells us. Right? Satan, the prince of the power of the air. So in verse 2, Paul writes, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

So we're captured by the world, and we're captured, we're enslaved by Satan. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. Right? Satan is working in the realm of ideas and promoting malevolent concepts, breeding despicable ideas.

[28 : 26] Again, some of the things we just talked about in society. Right? The whole world system is right from the devilish pit of hell. Paul also writes in verse 2, that Satan is actively at work in unbelievers.

Do you see that? In the sons of disobedience. Now, this is an interesting way to put this, right? Paul is highlighting that our disobedient nature as unbelievers is so deep.

It's so pervasive that he personifies disobedience, and he calls us its sons. Right? It's sort of like saying like father, like son.

Right? By nature, we are disobedient so much in our sinfulness as unbelievers, right, that disobedience is personified, and he calls it our parent, if you would.

We are being sons of disobedience. We are that by nature. And make note of that. We will talk about by nature in just a moment.

[29 : 30] But we are by nature disobedient. Well, the Bible describes Satan as what? As a liar? As a tempter? As a deceiver? As a devourer?

As a murderer? As a murderer? This is the one who is at work in unbelievers. They are in bondage to him. Before Christ, we were also enslaved to our own flesh.

So world, Satan, and the third point that Paul makes is that we were enslaved to our own flesh. Read with me in verse 3. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind.

Now, one clarification here. Paul is not talking about normal bodily desires like food and sleep and intimacy. These are all good things created by God.

To be clear in this context, though, Paul is referring to these natural desires being perverted into sinful desires. Appetite for food becomes what?

[30 : 40] Gluttony. Appetite for sleep becomes slothfulness. And appetite for intimacy becomes lust. The Greek word used here for passions conveys the idea of a desire, a craving, a longing, a desire for what is forbidden.

And I think lust is a great word that sort of conveys that thought of passions, passions of our flesh. Regarding the mind, what would be simple desires of the mind?

Pride? False ambition? Rejection of truth? Malicious or vengeful thoughts? You can probably think of more.

The list goes on. Desire, sinful desires of the mind. Well, Paul writes that as unbelievers, as sons of disobedience, we are in bondage to our own self-centered passions of the flesh.

Sinful desires of our body and of our mind. We get all that out of the first couple of verses of Ephesians 2. It's bad news, isn't it?

[31 : 57] It's bad news. But Paul has not yet completed his description of our pre-Christian state. He has one more unpleasant truth to tell us about.

And that's the second half of verse 3. What's it say? We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. After understanding what we've reviewed so far, that we're dead in our trespasses and sins, that we're living in the passions of our flesh and carrying out the desires of the body and mind, you might think that it's no surprise that Paul describes us as children of wrath.

For those of you who have the NIV, that translation says, we were deserving of wrath. Probably a little bit more descriptive. We are children of wrath.

We are deserving of wrath, God's wrath. However, note that Paul says that we are by nature children of wrath. If you're underliners in your Bible, it's a great phrase to underline.

You are by nature. He uses the term by nature children of wrath. That is, we are not children of wrath as a result of or as a consequence of living in the passions of our flesh and carrying out the simple desires of the body and mind.

[33 : 20] It's not a consequence of that. It's instead by nature. Remember a few minutes ago when we were looking at the phrase sons of disobedience?

Paul explained that Satan is now at work in the sons of disobedience. See, we did not become sons of disobedience as a result of Satan starting to work in us.

It didn't say Satan began working in unbelievers and they became disobedient. Paul writes that Satan started working in the sons of disobedience.

We were already disobedient. That was our nature. But where did this nature come from? You may know the answer to that one, right? We become from the line of Adam, right?

As does all mankind. We are all sinners. Romans 5.12. Just hopefully this is a refresher for you all. Romans 5.12. Paul writes that sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin.

[34 : 26] And so death spread to all men. Adam passed to all his descendants the inherent sinful nature that he possessed because of his first disobedience.

See, because we are by nature sinners, therefore we sin. Because we are by nature disobedient, therefore we disobey.

And Paul writes in Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death. We are deserving of God's wrath. We are the children by nature, children of wrath.

Now that's the bad news. Y'all depressed? Remember, this is not you if you are saved. In Jesus. Without Christ, we are spiritually dead.

So again, just reviewing the first three verses, we're spiritually dead. We are dead men walking while physically alive on this earth, if you're a non-believer. We're spiritually dead. We've been enslaved by the world, by the devil, and by our flesh.

[35 : 34] And by our own nature, we are condemned as children of wrath. We are deserving of God's holy wrath. Bad news if you don't have Christ. What's verse 4 start?

But God. Right? But God. And so let's spend the rest of our time this morning talking about the good news, right? But God. So let me read verses 4 through 7.

As we look at the good news of salvation, Paul writes in verse 4, But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, see again, Paul's making sure that we understand this dead thing, right?

We are, even when we are dead, spiritually dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. And raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Beautiful, beautiful verses. Well, simply put, I could probably just say, Hey, God saved us. Let's pray, right? I could, I could.

[36 : 50] But we have 30 more minutes, 25 more minutes, so we'll keep going, right? Simply put, God saved us, right? By grace you have been saved. Paul writes that twice in verse 5 and verse 8.

Now saved, now some of you Bible scholars, you probably will know this, but when Paul uses the word saved here, in the Greek, it's a perfect participle. Remember what that means?

Anything in the present, in the perfect tense in Greek, it conveys the sense of completion in the past with ongoing, continuing results. Right?

So that is, it emphasizes the abiding consequences of God's saving action in the past. It's like saying, you have been saved and you remain forever saved.

That's a point where you say hallelujah, right? His salvation is not a one and done. It's a one and eternal. Well, notice in verses 4 and 5, there's three verbs, right?

[37 : 48] Sorry, Bible students. Look at closely at verses 5 and 6. Yeah, verses 5 and 6. There's three verbs that Paul uses here. In verse 5, he says that he made us alive together with Christ.

God made us alive. So made us alive. That's the verb, made. Made us alive. Verse 6, raised us up with Him. And then later in verse 6, seated us with Him, with Christ, in the heavenly places.

Right? Made us alive, raised us up, and seated us. Made us alive, raised us up, seated us. Does that sound familiar?

Do those actions, those sequence of actions, sound familiar? Made alive, raised up, and seated, right?

That parallels what God the Father did for God the Son. Resurrection, ascension, session. Session means seating.

[38 : 51] Right? Here in Ephesians 2, in Ephesians 2 now, Paul is not writing about Jesus. He's not writing about what God did for Jesus. We saw that in chapter 1. Now, Paul is writing about us, those who are saved.

That is, Paul is not affirming here that God quickened, and raised, and seated Christ, but that God quickened, and raised, and seated us with Christ.

That's good news, y'all. Amen. Amen. The union of God's people with Christ, this is what it means to be in Christ. I don't know how many times I should have counted, but the phrase, in Christ, we see that a lot in chapter 1, in chapter 2, about being in Christ.

Well, that's the union of God's people with Christ. As believers, we've been saved in Christ. We share in that resurrection, and ascension, and ascension.

And verse 6 says that we do so in the heavenly places. Right? That's the unseen world of spiritual reality in which the principalities and the powers operate, and in which Christ reigns supreme.

[40 : 04] There God has blessed His people in Christ, and there He has seated them, seated us, with Christ. We were dead, but we've been made spiritually alive.

Right? We were in captivity, but we've now been enthroned with Christ. That's mind-blowing, mind-boggling to understand that. Well, why did God do this?

What prompted God to act on our behalf? Well, Paul gives us three words in this section of Scripture. In verse 4, backing up a little bit, in verse 4, Paul writes, God being rich in mercy.

Right? Mercy. But I want to focus on rich a little bit. Rich, abundant, overflowing, abounding, God being rich in mercy. Mercy is defined, it's God's goodness and kindness to those who need help.

If that's familiar, we studied this about four, five, six weeks ago on Wednesday night when we were going through some of the attributes of God. Mercy again, God's goodness and kindness to those who need help.

[41 : 19] For those who are down and out, so to speak, in trouble. And that was us, right? We were dead, we were helpless to save ourselves. Only God's mercy could reach the helpless.

So God being rich in mercy, that was one prompting. Secondly, the second half of verse 4, because of the great love with which He loved us. We were condemned under God's wrath, so only God's love, His great love, His agape love, could triumph over wrath.

And the third reference we see in verses 5 and 8, by grace you have been saved. God's grace is similar to His mercy in that it's an action reflecting His goodness and kindness towards someone who is undeserving.

All right? So while mercy can be viewed as withholding some deserved judgment or consequence, right, grace is the granting of undeserved favor.

We deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment. Do you agree? We're spiritually dead. We deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment on account of those trespasses and sins that we are dead in.

[42 : 35] So it's only God's grace that could rescue us. Why did God save us? Rich mercy, great love, and amazing grace out of His kindness.

And more than that, move on to verse 7. Paul writes in verse 7 that God saved us in order that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

You remember when we read and when I read just a moment ago back in chapter 1 verses 19 and 20, Paul prays that the believers in Ephesus may know what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Remember when we read that? If not, flip back to chapter 1. What is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly places?

Well, in raising and exalting Christ, God had demonstrated the immeasurable greatness of His power. So we talked about that. Verse 1 was about God raising Christ.

[43 : 49] And He demonstrates the immeasurable greatness of His power. But now, in chapter 2, when He talks about raising us from our spiritual deadness, it says here, Paul writes here, God displays the immeasurable riches of His grace.

You see that? Chapter 1, immeasurable greatness of His power in raising Christ. Chapter 2, immeasurable riches of His grace. And He will continue to do that through all eternity.

That's verse 7. Well, let's continue. Verses 8 and 9, Paul further elaborates on salvation and God's grace. And it explains what it is and what it is not.

So verse 8, let me read verses 8 and 9. For 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.

Verses 8 and 9. Salvation is by grace through faith. Paul doesn't write that in verse 5. If you look at verse 5, right, he sort of interrupts.

[44 : 57] He's talking about God being rich in mercy because of His great love. And then in the ESV, there's sort of a hyphen and says, by grace you have been saved. And then he continues about how we are raised up with Him.

But here in verse 8, he says, for by grace you have been saved, like he did in verse 5, but he adds, through faith. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

Well, where does the faith come from? Well, the answer is in the second half of verse 8 and verse 9. It is not of your own doing. I think for those of you who have the NASB translation, it says, not of yourselves.

Not of your own doing. Not of yourselves, right? It's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Paul is making sure we understand that our faith is a gift from God.

When we accept, when we believe, when we trust the finished work of Christ on the cross on our behalf, we act by the faith supplied by God's grace.

[46 : 02] By grace through faith. That is, the only thing a person can do that will have any part in his salvation is to exercise the faith in what Jesus Christ has already done for him.

Or to put it in another way, faith is our response in salvation, in his saving work. God saves us, and then we respond through faith by believing and trusting him.

Some theologians put it this way, regeneration, or spiritual resurrection, but regeneration precedes faith. And doesn't that make sense based on what we've read already in the first few verses of chapter 2?

No one is able to believe in Christ until they've been regenerated, until they've been made spiritually alive by God. Why? Because we were spiritually dead.

Remember? We had no spiritual heartbeat. We were spiritually flatlined. Remember how we define sin and physical death? Inability to respond, inability to respond to any sort of stimulus?

[47 : 21] We were spiritually dead. So how in the world could we believe if we were spiritually dead? It requires God to bring us alive, to bring us spiritual life, and then our response is that belief.

We were spiritually flatlined. We were enslaved by the world. Remember what we just talked about, enslaved by the world, dead in our sins, enslaved by Satan, by the flesh. We were, again, as I've said earlier, we were dead.

We are dead men walking apart from Christ. Well, verse 9, Paul writes that our salvation is all by God's grace, and therefore, Paul writes, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Since Paul has made clear that human effort had nothing to do with our salvation, what could we then possibly boast about? All right?

Now, some of you may be thinking, 1 Corinthians, what, 131, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord? All right, so, all right, aside from that, right, if we're going to boast, we're going to boast in the Lord, but what possibly could we boast about?

[48 : 29] And the answer is nothing. It's nothing. It's nothing that we did. See, a biblical understanding of our salvation, right, it eliminates all boasting. Right?

In Romans 3, 27 and 28, and in that section, and turn there if you'd like, but in Romans 3, verses 27 and 28, which follows a powerful section in the preceding verses where Paul explains justification by grace through redemption that's in Christ and all of this to be received by faith.

So this is what Paul writes, though, in verses 27 and 28. He writes, then what becomes of our boasting, right, in view of this justification by grace, this salvation, what becomes of our boasting it is excluded.

By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, by a law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

So understanding what God has done in us, Paul writes, so that no one may boast. We are rendered, we shouldn't be boasting, right? So, do you know anyone who, especially maybe as a believer, has a problem boasting, maybe has a pride issue?

[49 : 50] Some people come to mind, and that's okay, we're all sort of working, I'm not thinking of you, anyone specific, but in general, you know, have a boasting problem, issue with pride?

I'm not going to look at anyone, I'll look at the wall. Do any of you, at times, if you're a believer, do you have a problem, a little pride issue, a little boasting, challenge?

You want to know what an effective antidote for that is? Vitamin E, E for Ephesians, right? Take some Ephesians and stick it right in your heart, right?

Ephesians, right? We need to be reminded of these truths. Ephesians 2, 1 through 10, this will remedy us from boasting because it's all about God.

It's not about us. We'll get to us in verse 10, but it's not all, it's not about us. As believers, in view of God saving us, we should be clothed in humility every second of every day.

[50 : 56] And that's what Peter tells us to do, right? 1 Peter 5, 5, Peter writes, clothe yourselves, all of you. He says, clothe yourselves, comma, all of you, all right, with humility toward one another.

For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Well, why does God oppose the proud? Because it steals glory that is due to Him, right?

It steals glory. We like the glory, but it steals the glory when we're prideful, when we're boastful. He opposes the proud. All right, well, where do we fit into all this then, right?

So this is verse 10. So verse 10, been waiting for verse 10. I love verse 10. It's so beautiful. Let me read it. For we are His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

All right, so up to verse 10, so verses 1 through 9, Paul has described salvation in terms of resurrection from the dead and a liberation from slavery, right?

[52 : 07] A rescue from the condemnation that is due us, right? Each of these descriptions declares that the work is God's and God's alone because dead people cannot bring themselves to life, nor can captive or condemned people set themselves free.

So, as people who are spiritually alive and have been set free through salvation, what are we considered? We are His workmanship.

Workmanship. The Greek word is poiema. Poiema. This is actually, you know, do I have that up there? I can't remember, Josiah. Do I have poiema? Oh, I do.

So listen, you know, when Jeff or I gives you all Greek words, like I don't ever remember the Greek words. This is a good one to remember, right? Poiema, it's a great word to remember, especially for those of you who are memorizing verse 10.

We're on verse 10. This is your verse this month to memorize. Poiema. Workmanship. The literal definition of this in the Greek is a thing that has been made. All right, well, that's, there's nothing.

[53 : 09] Okay, yeah, workmanship. Something has been made. But the idea here is that it's, the words poet or poem, right, that, our English words poet or poem come from this Greek word, right?

It infers the idea of a work of art. So more in context with this usage, it infers the idea of a work of art or a masterpiece. Ah, that's where I was trying to get to.

The idea of a masterpiece. We are God's workmanship. We are His masterpiece. For those of you who are lovers of art, lovers of music, I won't, I won't do a show of hands, but I think we have some folks in here who appreciate and love art and music.

As you're gazing at an amazing piece of artwork or as you're listening to an incredible piece of music, doesn't your thinking go to the artist behind that art or that song?

You know, when you look at something and it's like, wow, who drew that or who sculpted that or music? Who wrote that music? Right? It's just natural for us to look at something that is made and sort of then shift to who made that?

[54 : 19] Right? Artwork brings attention or glory to the artist. Right? And in the same way, we as God's workmanship, as God's masterpiece, we bring attention and glory to God.

Well, how do we do that? Through our good works. Right? That's the second part of this verse. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

These are where the works come in. Right? I've been trying to stave off works until now. Right? These are where the works come in. We are not saved because of works.

That's clear in verse 9. But we are saved and created in Christ Jesus for good works. Right? For good works. No good works can produce salvation, but many good works are produced by salvation.

Right? You've got to get the cart behind the horse. Right? The works come after the salvation. It's a result of that. Do you recall how earlier the term sin was literally defined in the Greek as missing the mark?

[55 : 33] Right? Missing the target of God's glory? Well, with this in mind, keep this in mind. I'm tying some, connecting some dots here. With this in mind, turn over to John 15.8 because in John 15.8 this is where these two sort of concepts are tied together.

So John 15.8 upper room, right? Hours before Jesus leads his disciples to the garden and eventually he's arrested. Right? So he's in the upper room teaching his disciples and this is what Jesus says in John 15.8.

By this my Father is glorified. Ah! There's the target. By this my Father is glorified that what? That you bear much fruit.

Ah! That's it. There's the good works. Bear much fruit, you do good works or deeds and so prove to be my disciples. So you see that? So when we as believers do good works, as believers when we do good works we glorify God.

We hit the target. And further, our good works also serve as proof that we are his disciples. And what does that do?

[56 : 46] That glorifies God as well. Right? According to John 15. So good works are indispensable to salvation. Again, not as its grounds or as its means to salvation but instead as its consequence, right?

As its evidence or as its proof of salvation. Well, please note there at the very end of verse 10 Paul writes, because God prepared them beforehand that we should walk in them.

Right? Yeah, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. This is why James says that faith is illegitimate if works are not present. Right? James 2.17 probably a familiar verse to you all.

So also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead. That's why James writes this. Faith and works they go hand in hand but the order has got to be correct.

Right? Faith then good works. So perhaps you know as theologians say earlier you know regeneration precedes faith. Maybe we could add to that good works follow faith.

[57 : 56] Get that order correct. Alright. Well in conclusion as I look at the clock and I know we're almost up on time here we end in verse 10 we sort of end where we began with our walk.

Did you notice that? Is it verse 1? Yeah. Or verse 2 you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. And look at verse 10 good works for which God prepared beforehand that we should walk.

We've sort of come full circle that we should walk in our good works. So formally we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked were trapped by the world by the devil and by our flesh but now we walk in good works which Christ has eternally planned for us to do.

Can you think of that for a minute? God eternally right? God prepared beforehand. Well when was beforehand? Well if God was preparing good works for us that means God had to have been thinking about us and think about saving us and what does Paul say in verse verse 1 is it verse 4 of chapter 1 shows us before the foundation of the world so before the foundation of the world not only did he choose us but he's already lined up good works for us to walk in.

Isn't that amazing? It's all God's sovereignty. It's all laid out. It's all laid out. Hallelujah. Well the contrast is clear right? It's a contrast as we look at these 10 verses it's a contrast between two lifestyles right?

[59 : 37] Evil and good and behind those lifestyles two masters right? Satan and God. It's also a contrast between who we are by nature and who we are by grace.

Our sermon title by nature versus by grace. Alright so what do we do with this? Application time. What do we do with this?

At the beginning I sort of suggested if you were familiar with these verses it would be refreshing and encouraging. If you weren't familiar with it it would be at the time of teaching. If you were a non-believer it may be sobering.

What do we do with this? What's the application of these 10 verses? Well again I just want to say if you're not a believer perhaps this is a wake up call of sorts.

It's a sober warning right? And if you're not a believer when you walked in and you're not a believer I may have said some things that were hurtful maybe you're offended a little bit but I'm just sharing with you what Paul wrote and what God has provided in scripture.

[60 : 44] This is a wake up call it should be a wake up call. Scripture says if you're a non-believer if you have not been saved by the grace of Jesus Christ right? You are a child of wrath.

You are deserving of God's wrath. And so I would beg you I would implore you to run to Jesus.

Now what run to Jesus that's a Christian term but what do you mean run to Jesus? Well I love going to 2nd Corinthians 5 21 in times like this.

If there's a clear concise verse one verse that sort of explains what's it mean to run to Jesus and to accept the grace of God through Jesus it's 2nd Corinthians 5 21 and Paul writes for our sake right?

He starts off verse 21 for our sake. He God the Father made him Jesus Christ to be sin who knew no sin so that in him in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

[61 : 51] Well great what's that mean? Well if you can just picture it in your mind God the Father takes our sin and puts it on his son who knew no sin right? And God poured out his wrath on his son right?

Paid that penalty of our sinfulness of our spiritual deadness of the trespasses and sins that we once lived right? So that in him in Christ Jesus we might become the righteousness of God we are now clothed in Christ perfection in his holiness is goodness right?

We are perfect in Christ that's what 2 Corinthians 5:21 says and that's what I mean by run to Jesus if you do not believe if you are not a believer you have not taken Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior this morning and you're still sort of thinking through this re-read Ephesians 2 listen to a recording of this sermon ask someone grab me grab someone who's a church member here and let us have the privilege and the honor to share what it means to be saved to be spiritually alive if you are a believer aren't you humbled by this truth right?

Hopefully I think most everyone I don't know if everyone but most everyone in here you're humbled by this truth you gotta be right? these truths are amazing hopefully they're familiar hopefully they reinvigorate maybe they refresh your worship of your Lord we have so much to be grateful for do we not as believers perhaps this morning is a type of attitude readjustment right?

Maybe you've just been in a rut right? You've just been grumpy right? So maybe these verses all of God's word right? ministers to our heart but these verses this morning maybe these verses have ministered to you and have provided just the attitude adjustment that you need perhaps it's a good reminder that as we do good works and walk in them day to day in life perhaps it's a good reminder that when you do good works you do it for the glory of God right?

[64 : 04] Don't forget that in your occupation in your hobbies in your one another's we do all things all the good works that God has laid out before the foundation of the world we do that for his glory Jesus Christ we are living evidences we are masterpieces we are his workmanship of his mercy and his love and his grace and his kindness so therefore what do we do we point people away and beyond ourselves to him right?

we are his masterpiece his workmanship that's what we do we are to move the glory redirect the glory any glory is coming to us we redirect that to him to the one to whom we owe our salvation there may be some other applications that are in your mind but I would pray that you would just be be be mindful of what those could be how God has worked in your heart this morning as we have read Ephesians 2 through 1 through 10 well usually at the end of our worship service right Jeff prays after a sermon and then we sing one additional song and then I'll come up and close us in prayer so before we sing our closing song I do want to point out verse 4 of the song we're about to sing in the cross alone I glory because the lyrics of the last verse line up perfectly with verse 10 about us being the workmanship of God and so as we sing this actually Josiah would you mind putting on the screen verse 4 so this is the this is the last verse verse 4 the song we're about to sing never will I seek the glory that was never meant for me right always heavenward reflecting right we're his workmanship we're his masterpiece we should be reflecting glory away from us and to him all to Jesus to receive all to Jesus to receive and then hit the chorus

Josiah the next slide in the cross alone I glory nothing of mine own to give right Paul wrote that it's not of us it's not of our good works we have nothing of our own to give only that which Christ has offered for my soul that I may live for my soul that I may live so there's some Ephesians 2 verse 10 right in that song we're about to sing so let me pray and then we will sing and then I'll close this up in prayer so let me pray so Father we just want to thank you Lord for your goodness we want to thank you for your truth we want to thank you for your word we want to thank you for how you teach us and grow us and mold us Father thank you for saving us Father we were spiritually dead we were walking zombies just going through the motions on the earth thinking maybe that we were good and not knowing that there is no goodness in us thank you Father because of your great riches because of your amazing grace because of your just overabundant love for us that you have saved us for those who you have called thank you for salvation thank you for the honor thank you for the privilege of being called your child for being your workmanship

Lord Father I pray that we would take these truths this morning Father and help us to be accurate workmanships masterpieces of how you have created us to be alive Father I pray I pray that you would help us to redirect any glory that we would have on us Lord redirected to you for your glory Lord because we love you and we are grateful for all that you provide for us in Christ's name Amen Amen