

Ephesians: Grace Changes Everything

Part 4. Alive in Christ

As we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we arrive at a passage that vividly contrasts our life before and after Christ. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul describes our former state of spiritual death, our transformation through God's grace, and our new identity and purpose in Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-10 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you *followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.*

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

This passage can be divided into three main sections: our condition before Christ (verses 1-3), our transformation through Christ (verses 4-7), and our new life and purpose in Christ (verses 8-10). Each section provides us with a profound understanding of God's grace and the radical change it brings to our lives.

Our Condition Before Christ (2:1-3)

Paul begins by describing the stark reality of our spiritual condition before we came to know Christ. He uses strong language to convey the depth of our lostness and the seriousness of our plight.

Dead in Transgressions and Sins:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Paul uses the metaphor of death to describe our spiritual state apart from Christ. We were not just spiritually sick or weak; we were dead. Our transgressions and sins had completely separated us from the life of God. Spiritual death means that we were unable to respond to God or seek Him on our own. Just as a physically dead person cannot revive themselves, so too, we are incapable of bringing ourselves back to life spiritually. This highlights the necessity of divine intervention and the power of God's grace.

Following the Ways of the World:

"In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Our lives before Christ were marked by conformity to the patterns and values of the world. We followed the ways of the world, influenced by the ruler of the kingdom of the air, which refers to Satan. The world and its values are often in direct opposition to God's kingdom. Before Christ, we were influenced and controlled by the spirit of disobedience, leading us away from God and into a life of sin.

Gratifying the Cravings of the Flesh:

"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." Our pre-Christian lives were characterized by a pursuit of selfish desires and sinful cravings. We followed the inclinations of our flesh, leading to actions and thoughts that were contrary to God's will.

This state of living according to the flesh made us deserving of God's wrath. God's wrath is His holy and just response to sin. It is not arbitrary or capricious but an inescapable aspect of His righteousness. Our sinful nature and actions placed us under His judgment.

Our Transformation Through Christ (2:4-7)

Paul then transitions from describing our former condition to highlighting the transformative power of God's grace. He explains how God's love and mercy have brought about a radical change in our lives.

Made Alive with Christ:

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved." Despite our state of spiritual death, God's great love and rich mercy intervened. He made us alive with Christ, resurrecting us from our spiritual death. This transformation is entirely due to God's grace. It is not something we earned or deserved or made happen in any way – it is a gift from God. His love and mercy motivated Him to rescue us from our hopeless condition and give us new life in Christ.

Raised and Seated with Christ:

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." Our union with Christ means that we share in His resurrection and exaltation. Just as Christ was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father, we too have been raised and seated with Him in the heavenly realms. This positional truth signifies our new status and identity in Christ. We are no longer bound by the powers of this world but are seated with Christ in a place of authority and honour. This gives us a new perspective and empowers us to live victoriously.

Demonstration of God's Grace:

"In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." God's purpose in transforming us is to display the incomparable riches of His grace. Our lives become a testimony to His kindness and the greatness of His grace. Throughout eternity, God's grace will be on display through the lives of those He has redeemed. This demonstrates His character and brings glory to His name. Our transformation is not just for our benefit but also to reveal God's grace and power to the world.

Our New Life and Purpose in Christ (2:8-10)

Paul concludes this passage by emphasizing the nature of our salvation and our new purpose in Christ. He highlights that our salvation is by grace through faith and that we are created for good works.

Saved by Grace Through Faith:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." Paul reiterates that our salvation is entirely by grace through faith. It is a gift from God, not something we can achieve through our own efforts.

This truth eliminates any basis for boasting. We cannot take credit for our salvation because it is a work of God's grace from start to finish. Our response is simply to receive this gift by faith, trusting in what Christ has done for us.

God's Handiwork:

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Our new identity in Christ means that we are God's handiwork, His masterpiece. We have been created anew in Christ Jesus with a specific purpose: to do good works. These good works are not the basis of our salvation but the result of it. They are the evidence of our new life in Christ and the fruit of God's transforming grace. God has prepared these works in advance for us to walk in, giving our lives purpose and direction.

Practical Applications:

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a profound passage, focusing on the transformation from spiritual death to life in Christ, by God's grace. Here are some obvious practical applications based on this passage:

Recognize Your Past Condition

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 2:1-2)

Before knowing Christ, we were spiritually dead, incapable of living the life God designed for us. Paul reminds us that without Christ, our condition was not just flawed but dead - spiritually lifeless. Recognizing this past reality is crucial for developing a deeper sense of humility and gratitude. It highlights the stark contrast between life before Christ and life after Christ, reminding us of the seriousness of sin and our desperate need for salvation.

Regularly reflecting on your past condition can create a deep sense of thankfulness and humility. It is important to understand where you came from, spiritually speaking, to appreciate the depth of God's mercy. This should move you to greater compassion toward others who are still lost in their sin. Instead of being judgmental, we are reminded that we, too, were once in exactly the same place, following the ways of the world, until God intervened and made us alive in Christ.

Take time to journal or reflect on your spiritual journey - the moments where you felt far from God, how He brought you out, and the transformation that took place. Consider sharing this testimony with someone who may be struggling in their own journey. This can encourage them to see God's power to change lives.

Acknowledge God's Grace and Love

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Paul shifts the focus from humanity's deadness in sin to God's great love and mercy. Our salvation is entirely dependent on God's grace, not on any merit of our own. This is a key truth for believers, as it shapes how we see our relationship with God. We didn't earn our way into God's favour - He extended it freely out of love. This recognition should always stir up profound gratitude in us and a reliance on God's grace every day of our lives.

Acknowledge that it's solely because of God's love and grace that you are saved. There is nothing you could have done to deserve it. This should lead you to embrace a life of worship, praise, and gratitude. It also encourages you to extend grace to others because God first extended grace to you.

Begin each day with a prayer of thanksgiving. Make it a daily habit to thank God for His mercy and grace. Also, look for opportunities to show grace to others in your life. This could mean forgiving someone who has wronged you or helping someone without expecting anything in return.

Live in the Reality of New Life

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6)

This passage emphasizes that believers are not just spiritually alive; we are seated with Christ in heavenly realms. This is a powerful declaration of the believer's new identity and status. Although we live in this earthly kingdom, we are now also citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and our spiritual position in Christ is secure. Living in this reality should affect how we approach our daily lives - from how we interact with others to how we respond to challenges.

Embrace your new life and identity in Christ. You are no longer defined by your past mistakes or sins but by the life of Christ living within you. This realization gives you confidence to live out your faith boldly and victoriously.

Make a conscious effort to live out your new identity in Christ every day in every part of your life. This could involve starting the day by meditating on scriptures that affirm who you are in Christ (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:17). Engage in spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship with other believers to remind yourself of your heavenly position and live accordingly.

Boast in God, Not Yourself

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation is a gift from God, given by grace and received through faith. It is not something we can achieve by our own efforts, so we have no grounds to boast about our salvation. This truth should humble us, reminding us that we are entirely dependent on God for our salvation. It also challenges any self-righteous tendencies, pushing us to continually point others to God's grace rather than our own works or achievements. So, keep your heart focused on God's grace, and resist the temptation to take credit for your salvation or spiritual growth. Always give glory to God for what He has done in your life. When people commend you for your spiritual progress or good deeds, develop the habit of redirecting the praise back to God. Share with others how it is God's grace working in and through you that enables you to live a life of faith.

Understand You Are Created for Good Works

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

As believers, we are God's handiwork, His masterpiece, created for a purpose. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. This means that our lives should reflect God's purposes and plans. These good works are not arbitrary but are prepared by God in advance. Every believer has a specific role to play in God's kingdom, and we are called to live it out.

Embrace the truth that your life has a divine purpose. You were created to make a positive impact in the world through the good works that God has planned for you. This should motivate you to seek out ways to serve others, contribute to the church, and live out your faith in tangible ways. Ask God to reveal the specific good works He has prepared for you. Take time to reflect on your gifts, talents, and passions, and look for ways to use them in service to others. This could involve volunteering in your church or community, mentoring someone, or using your skills to help those in need.

Embrace Humility and Service

Knowing that you are saved by grace should inspire a life of humility. There is no room for arrogance in the Christian life. Instead, we should view ourselves as servants, seeking to build up others rather than ourselves. Christ set the example of humility and service, and we are called to follow His lead. Cultivate a servant heart by looking for opportunities to bless and give to others in your daily life. This might mean helping a neighbour, volunteering for a cause, or offering encouragement to someone in need. Make it a goal to serve without seeking recognition or praise.

Trust in God's Power to Transform

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you. This should give you confidence that God is continually transforming you, even in areas where you struggle. Trust that God is working in your life, sanctifying you and making you more like Christ. When facing difficulties or areas of personal weakness, remind yourself of God's power to transform. Approach these challenges with faith, trusting that God is not done with you yet. You may even create a specific prayer journal where you write down the areas you are asking God to transform you and document how He is answering those prayers over time.

Conclusion:

The practical applications of Ephesians 2:1-10 are life-changing and relevant for daily Christian living. As we reflect on these truths, let us recognize the reality of spiritual death, embrace God's grace, live out our new identity, be a testimony of His grace, and engage in the good works He has prepared for us. May we carry these truths in our hearts and live out our faith boldly and joyfully.

As we pause at this point in our study of this amazing Epistle, may we continue to grow in our understanding of God's grace and live out the new life we have in Christ. Amen.