

Ephesians 2:1-10
God, By Grace, Gave Us Life in Christ

SERIES CONTEXT

This October marks the 500th anniversary of the reformation. We've been examining the main tenants of the reformation – the five “Solas.” “Sola” is Latin for “only” or “alone.” Thus far we've looked at Sola Scriptura – By Scripture alone. Solus Christus – By Christ alone. Last week Dave taught on Sola Fide – By faith alone. Today, we'll look at Sola Gratia – By grace alone. But before we do, let's pray.

PRAY

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INTRODUCTION

Philipp Yancey recounts “a British conference on comparative religions, [where] experts from around the world debated what belief was unique to Christianity. They began eliminating the possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. ‘What’s all the fuss about?’ he asked. They replied that they were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, ‘Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.’”

It’s true, among world religions Christianity is unique. The Buddhist earns salvation by following an eight-fold path. The Hindu earns salvation with good *karma*. The Muslim earns salvation through keeping the code of law. It’s the same for Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses. Only biblical Christianity proclaims salvation by *grace alone*. According to biblical Christianity salvation is an unearned and undeserved gift from God. And while we could demonstrate this from a number of biblical texts, this morning we’ll look at **Ephesians 2:1-10**. **The main idea is that God, by grace alone, gave us life in Christ. God, by grace alone, gave us life in Christ.** We see three main lines of thought in this passage:

1. **Apart from Christ, we are dead.**
2. **With Christ, we are alive.**
3. **In Christ, we are God’s workmanship.**

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1. **APART FROM CHRIST, WE WERE DEAD**

Most of us know the words to ‘Amazing Grace,’ but when was the last time you were truly amazed by grace? Paul knew that we won’t be amazed by God’s grace until we’re clear about where we are apart from grace. Look at verses 1-3.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Paul says **APART FROM CHRIST WE WERE DEAD**. We were “**dead in our trespasses and sins.**” Our transgression and sins had rendered us spiritually dead. We were cut off from the Author of Life – the triune God. In the next paragraph, Paul uses words like “separated,” “alienated,” “having no hope and without God in the world.” We were spiritually dead to God. Some liken our condition to falling overboard and desperately treading water waiting for someone to throw a life preserver. But that’s not the picture here. We’re not merely in need of rescue. We’re not merely in need of a little help. No, we’re dead. A lifeless corpse at the bottom of the ocean.

Our spiritual death is marked by **defiance**. We were dead and **defiant**. Paul says we “**followed course of this world.**” Instead of following God we followed the values of the world. We’re told we matter by achieving, by having lots of sex, by making lots of money, and by how we look on the outside. And we believe it. We also “**followed the prince of the power of the air...**” Paul describes the devil as the ruler of an army of evil spiritual powers who promote **defiance** against the purposes of God. He convinces us that God isn’t real and we can do whatever we want with no consequences. It is this spirit of **defiance** that works in the hearts of fallen humanity. We **defiantly** followed the world and the devil. And our own sinful desires. “**We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.**” Apart from Christ, we carry out our self-centered desires and ignore the purposes of God. Paul captures this tendency with the word ‘flesh.’ In Romans Paul says that “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8).” We were dead and defiant. We followed the world, the devil, and the flesh.

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And the result is we were **doomed**. Apart from Christ, we were “**children of wrath.**” The world and the devil conspire to convince us that that there is no judgment; when we die that is the end – and then nothingness. But the Bible says that we we will all give an account. You and I are hurtling toward judgment. Death could come for us at any moment. And for those outside of Jesus Christ, there will be wrath and fury because we are dead and defiant. We were **doomed**.

Perhaps you struggle with the idea of God’s judgment. But in reality, you long for judgment. Think about it. When someone wrongs you, what do want? Justice. Will the NFL players kneel during the national anthem today? They demand justice. Whatever you think about it, that’s the crux of the issue for them, justice. Why do we instinctively want justice? Because we are created in the image of God. God’s judgment is simply justice. We all want justice; just not when it comes for me. God is perfectly just and he will right every wrong on the day of judgment. Wrongs committed against us and the wrong we commit. **Apart from Christ we were dead, defiant, and doomed.**

Our spiritual deadness to God has been likened to a Christmas tree. When you cut down a Christmas tree at that moment the tree is actually dead. It’s cut off from the source of life. We can dress up the tree with ornaments, lights, and tinsel but the fact is the tree is dead. Because of sin, we are cut off from the living God – the source of life. Apart from Christ, we are simply dressing ourselves up with ornaments, lights, and tinsel. We may accomplish amazing things. We may make a lot of money, or excel in sports or school or business or community service or the arts. But in reality, apart from Christ we are dead. We’ll never find the meaning and significance we crave in earthly accomplishments. We were made for more. We were made to love and enjoy our Creator. Apart from Christ, all our earthly accomplishments are like putting lights, ornaments, and tinsel on a dead tree. And like a Christmas tree, it won’t be long before it turns brown and is put out on the curb or burned.

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Paul says we are spiritually dead. Here's the implication: God does not owe us anything except justice. God would not be unjust if he were to save no one. God does not owe us salvation or anything else. He only owes us judgment. He does not owe us health, athletic abilities, educational opportunities, a good paying job, a warm bed to sleep in, music to listen to, or good food to eat. Any and all benefits we enjoy in this life are given by God's grace ("common" grace or "special" grace.)

TRANS: I wonder if we really see things the way Paul does? Do we really believe that's who we were or who we are? If we did then the next two words would seem amazing to us: "But God...!"

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2. **WITH CHRIST, WE ARE ALIVE**

“But God...” Yes, we were dead, defiant, and doomed.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were 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 in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

God made us alive together with Christ! But why did God do it? He wasn't obligated to do it. He owes us nothing but justice. So why does he show favor on those who are dead in their trespasses? Because he is **“rich in mercy”** and **“great in love”** – a mercy and love even for those who are dead in sin. To the Romans Paul writes, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners [dead, defiant, doomed], Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8)!”

Paul emphasizes that God's work in making us alive together with Christ is completely gracious. He says, “by grace you have been saved.” Grace is God's free and unmerited favor. When God looks with favor upon the spiritually dead, he does so freely and without obligation. God himself declares, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Rom. 9:15).” It's been said this way, “Grace is the unrequired, unobligated, self-determined, self-motivated, freely given mercy of God in Christ.” Notice that grace is primarily a disposition in God. That's how the Reformers understood grace. This stands in sharp contrast to Rome's understanding of grace as an energy infused through the sacraments that enables a person to merit salvation. Think of the sacraments like “taps of grace.” But Paul tells us that grace is not something separate from God but a disposition in God that prompts him to saving action.

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What does he do? The main verb in the passage is found in verse 5. God “**made us alive together with Christ.**” Just as Jesus raised Lazarus physically from the dead, so God gives spiritual life in Christ to those who were spiritually dead. Theologians call this “regeneration.” Christianity is not about becoming a nicer person, or starting a new religious routine. It’s about becoming a new person in Christ. God, by sheer grace, makes those who were spiritually dead spiritually alive with Christ.

And when God makes us spiritually alive with Christ, we begin to see that we are great sinners and that Jesus is a greater Savior. We’re amazed at his incarnation, his righteous life, his endurance on the cross. We’re amazed that God sent Jesus for proud, hostile, and defiant sinners like us. Why would God allow the whip to scourge the back of his Son, the thorns to be pressed into his head, and the nails to be driven into his hands and feet for us? Why? Because of his marvelous, amazing love and grace. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners [dead, defiant, doomed], Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8)!” In the cross, we see both the love of God and the justice of God.

George Whitfield was a famous eighteenth-century evangelist. On one occasion, a certain man was listening with his pockets stuffed with rocks. The man planned on attacking Whitefield after the sermon ended. But after Whitefield’s powerful and emotional message, the man made his way up to the preacher, emptied his pockets and said, “I came to hear you with my pocket full of stones to break your head, but your sermon broke my heart.” God gave this angry, hostile man life through the good news of Jesus. The implication is that no one is beyond the *reach* of God’s regenerating grace. And no one is beyond the *need* for God’s regenerating grace.

Notice how God “**made us alive together with Christ.**” Paul emphasizes our union with Christ! What is true of Jesus is true of us. As God powerfully **raised** Jesus from dead, so he **raised** believers to new life in Christ. As God **seated** Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places, so “believers are **seated** with Jesus in the heavenly places.”

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God graciously gave us life in Christ. God did all this “**so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**” The reason God pours out grace upon grace is so that we might be the demonstration of his grace forever! We, who were dead, are trophies of his grace. We who were dead are now alive with Christ and recipients of God’s unlimited grace in this age and in the one to come!

If we’re bored with grace it’s because we’ve forgotten who we were apart from Christ and what we deserve. If we’re bored with grace it’s because we’ve forgotten that God owes us nothing but judgment. John Newton never forgot where he came from and what he deserved. That’s why he wrote...

Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

TRANS: *God’s amazing grace enables us to see that we were dead. And now with Christ, we are alive. Next, Paul explains that our salvation is all of grace and how our new life in Christ results in a new way of life.*

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3. IN CHRIST, WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

Look at verses 8-10.

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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

In case we still don't get it, Paul repeats the phrase **"for by grace you have been saved..."** Notice how he clarifies that it is not earned or merited by anyone – not even in part: **"And this is not your doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."** Before we were dead in trespasses and sins. Now we are alive together with Christ. Before we were sons of disobedience. Now we are raised up with Christ. **"It's not your doing...not a result of works."** Paul says that our salvation is not in any respect a human work or a natural work. Our salvation is not us cooperating with God; rather, salvation is a supernatural work from start to finish.

Notice that **faith** is the instrument through which we receive salvation. But even our faith is a gift. When Paul says, "it is the gift of God" the "it" includes "faith." The grammar indicates that the whole of salvation is to be viewed as a gift. Grace is a gift. Faith is a gift. Salvation is a gift. So that no one may boast. One interpreter said it this way, "We should never think of salvation as a transaction in which God provides grace and we provide faith." No. Our salvation is a gift of God from start to finish.

This means that if you are a Christian this morning, it isn't because you are smarter than others, better looking than others, or more spiritual than others. No. It's because God chose to make you alive in Christ by his marvelous grace. He put forth his Son as our substitute and He granted us the faith to believe in him.

After emphatically saying our works cannot save us, Paul says that we were created new in Christ to do good works. **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** How does this fit together? **We are not saved by our good works but we are saved to good works. Or, good works are not the root of our salvation but they are the fruit of our salvation.** God graciously makes us new in Christ for a purpose – that we should live a new kind of life.

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Someone once said it like this: “Now that we belong to God, God is working on us and in us so that He might work through us.” Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).”

Paul says our good works have been “prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Some of you may think “God can’t use me...I’m not this...or that.” God graciously saved you and now enables you. He specifically designed good works for you to walk in. That means a lifestyle of good works. Notice that word “walk.” Compare it with verse 2. Where before we walked, or lived a lifestyle, of trespasses and sins, now we walk in the good works God has prepared for us.

Not perfectly in this life. As the Westminster Catechism says,

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, or only, will that which is good, but does also will that which is evil.

John Newton said it this way: “Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am.’”

The application is simple. Are we amazed by God’s grace to us in Christ? Those who are amazed by grace are humble, grateful, and motivated to do good works not to earn salvation but to please their heavenly Father. He’s already prepared good works beforehand that we should walk in them.

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CONCLUSION

Martin Luther called grace “the hinge on which all turns...” C.S. Lewis identified grace as Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. Biblical Christianity alone teaches that salvation is by grace alone from start to finish. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witness, and all others teach works-based salvation. Only biblical Christianity teaches the very good news that God, by grace alone, gave those who were dead life in Christ.