# Ephesians

Ephesians 2:1-10

## Introduction

Chapter 1 saw an initial outpouring of praise to God for all he has done on our behalf. He has

* Blessed us in the Messiah (v.3)
* Chosen us in him (v.4)
* Foreordained us through him for adoption as sons (v.5)
* Poured grace on us in him (v.6)
* Given us redemption in him (v.7)
* Set out his plan in him (v.9)
* Stated his intention to sum up everything in him (v.11)
* Given us a hope in him (v.12)
* Sealed us with his Spirit as the guarantee of what is to come (v.13-14)

Then in the second part of the chapter we heard Paul’s prayer for the young churches in which he prayed that they would have their knowledge and understanding of God increased so that they might know him better. Also, that the same power is at work within them (us) that raised Christ from the dead and seated him above all authority and power. He is now seated there for the sake of his church until we complete all that he has called us to do so that the work Christ set out to do will be completed through his church.

This brings us to chapter 2. In this section, Paul goes back to the basis of our salvation and calling. This is in order for us to see how we fit in with the plan and purpose of God to bring all things into subjection to Christ. You and I are like one piece of a huge jigsaw which God has been assembling through the ages, which will not be complete until Jesus returns. But without our piece, the whole will not be whole but will be left with a hole. So Paul sets out to tell us what our part is.

## v.1-7

In the first part of this passage, verses 1-7, Paul paints a picture for us of our need of salvation and what God has done about it. He starts by saying ‘as for you’. Who is the ‘you’? It is Gentile Christians. He will deal with Jewish Christians in a moment, but he begins with non-Jews like you and me.

He tells us a number of things in this passage about ourselves:

1. We were spiritually dead: dead in transgressions & sins

Our wrong way of life was such that it made us dead to God. Without salvation everyone is already dead. We are dead in terms of our relationship with God. We are headed for physical death with no hope of resurrection. We are on the way to eternal death – complete separation from God beyond the grave.

1. We used to walk in this way – just as the world walks – with no sense of our predicament or even that there was any other way to live. In doing so, we were in fact following Satan’s lead and dancing to the tune of the demonic forces around us, whether we believed in them or not. It is these forces who are continuing to work in those who reject God.
2. Paul then says that the Jews were no different – we all lived after the natural cravings of our body – if it feels good, it is good, therefore do it. We just let the cravings of our bodies guide our behaviour and set our conscience.
3. As a result of living like this, we should all suffer the consequences of our actions. It is in our very nature (our fallen nature) to behave like this and, if God had not done something about it, we would get to the end of the road and receive exactly what we deserve for our selfish way of living – punishment.

Is it any surprise the world around us doesn’t understand why we have an issue with its morality and behaviour? As far as they are concerned, they are just doing what comes naturally. There is no ultimate set of values by which behaviour can be governed. When we bring a different perspective, it is not surprising that the two sets of values are on a collision course.

Thus, Paul characterises our life before we came to faith.

But then he puts in a big ‘But’.

‘But God...’ Whenever you see such a ‘but’ in scripture it signals a change in direction. All that he has said up until this point is the natural process of life, sin, death and punishment. But God didn’t leave it like that. He stepped out of eternity and into our world in order to do something that would stop us living in a world of natural consequences. Instead he has created a world in which instead of getting what we deserve, we get what we don’t deserve – mercy. Why? Because he loves us!

The love of God could not stand back and let his creations simply go like lemmings over the cliff to their own destruction. From before the creation of the world he had his rescue plan prepared and it came to fruition in Jesus death and resurrection. It has flowed out of his love and been poured out through his rich mercy.

Even though we were dead in all the ways outlined above – dead to God, bound for physical death and dead for eternity – God resurrected us, and this is brought about through the resurrection of Christ. He hasn’t just resurrected us; he has also raised us up with Christ and has sat us down upon his throne in heaven alongside Jesus. He has done this so that in the future – in the age to come –we might be displayed as trophies of his grace for all who would look on.

What does it mean that we are raised up with Christ and seated in heavenly places with him? It has to do with our present status as believers.

When Jesus was resurrected, he triumphed over death. When he ascended to heaven it was because his sacrifice for sin had been accepted by the father. As a result of these two things, he is now in the position of lordship over the whole universe. Because of our sin, we were dead, but because he has triumphed over sin, we are raised from the dead. More than that, however, because he has triumphed over the enemy who would destroy his creation, so we triumph over the enemy through what Jesus has done on our behalf. As a result, we are seated with him in the position of rulership. This is not because we have, can, or will do anything to deserve it or to achieve it by ourselves. It is because he has done it all on our behalf.

Thus, my position is one of victory today. I don’t have to live in subjection to sin, guilt, fear or condemnation. It is all dealt with at the cross. I am free and confident to live knowing that all of this has been dealt with by Jesus and, because I am in Christ Jesus, I am free from its power.

* We do not need to stand under condemnation or guilt or fear today
* We do not need to let wrong ways of living triumph
* We do not need to believe the lies of the enemy who would keep us entrapped in our past
* It is all dealt with through Jesus, because of God’s rich mercy and love.

## v.8-9

This salvation comes to us through grace. That means it comes completely undeserved. You can’t earn it, you can’t work for it, you will never deserve it. In fact, you have done everything possible to put yourself outside of it. And yet God, not content to leave you in that hopeless state, rescued you.

How do we get in on this great grace? Through faith! We have to believe that what the Bible says has been achieved for us and in us is the reality. It doesn’t come from doing good works or else that would give you a reason to boast and would mean that you will have contributed something to your salvation.

The reality is that we can contribute nothing to our salvation. Even faith itself is a gift that God gives us as he brings revelation to us of all that he has done. From start to finish our salvation is a gift that comes to us from God. You can’t add anything to it; you can’t take anything from it; you can only receive it by faith.

## V.10

This brings us to v.10. Let’s break this down a bit.

‘We are his handiwork’. There is a sense here in the original in which this means we are God’s work of art. Some of us may not look much of an oil painting, but, from God’s perspective, that is exactly what we are.

We are made in the image of God. When he looks at us he sees, reflected back, something of himself. However tarnished or damaged that image may become, we still exemplify the creator to all of creation. It is in your shape, your form, your character, your intellect, everything about you reflects the image of the creator. It is he who made us what we are.

Don’t speak badly of yourself. Don’t do yourself down. Don’t wish you were this or that or had this nose or those eyes. What you are is what God designed you to be. God doesn’t make mistakes.

‘Created in Christ Jesus’. Here Paul refers to the fact that, because of what Jesus has done, we are a new creation. Though the image has been marred and corrupted, that process is being reversed so that we will end up what we were always intended to be.

In ‘The strange case of Benjamin Button’, the main character is born as an old man and spends the whole of the film getting younger and younger until he returns to being a baby, etc. In one sense that is what is happening to us. The sin process, like the ageing process, is being reversed until eventually we will be as perfect and spotless as a newborn babe. This is what the cross is achieving in our lives as we submit ourselves to him.

‘Created...for good works’. Good works are not the means to our salvation but the consequence of it. In other words, it is not good enough to receive our salvation and then sit with our ticket in our hand waiting for heaven. We are created for much more than that. We are created to do stuff.

There are two things indicated by this:

1. We are created to live moral righteous lives that are in keeping with the freedom from sin that has come to us through Christ.
2. We are created to do stuff for the kingdom that will help others come into the same salvation that we have received.

Our salvation is not passive, it is active. It may come to us without price, flowing out of God’s grace, mercy and love, but the response to receiving it is the outworking of what we have received.

One of my biggest frustrations in the Christian world is passive Christians. It is as if all they have received freely from Jesus is of no more value and has no more consequence than receiving a bus ticket. ‘Thank you. That’s very nice. I look forward to using it when I go on my last journey. Now let me get back to what I was doing before’.

This is not good enough. The gift we have received is the most valuable thing we have. How we use it has consequences for this life and the life to come. The proof of our belief in what Jesus has done is how we live and what we do as a consequence of receiving his grace. That says much more about what we believe than our words.

‘Which God has prepared in advance that we should walk in them’, ‘or which God has prepared in advance for us to live our lives doing’.

God has a destiny for us. He prepared it before the foundation of the world. It is that which will give meaning and satisfaction to your life, as well as being that which will bring an eternal reward. Get on God’s agenda and your life will never be the same again.

There is a job that has your name on it. There is a role that only you can do. There are people who only you can reach. There are towns and situations that are waiting for you to step up to the plate in order that they might hear about Jesus. There are resources waiting to be released. There are aims and objectives that can only be hit if you play your part. God is waiting for you. He won’t wait forever.

Each one of us must take our calling seriously. We must find what it is and function in it for the sake of the kingdom. Don’t be a passive Christian; get on God’s agenda and start to fulfil it.