

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Seated with Him - Ephesians 2:1-10

In this series of studies in the epistle to the Ephesians we have been emphasising how everything is centred on Christ. So far we have seen how we were chosen in Christ and how we should be learning about Christ.

Today we will consider Ephesians 2:1-10 and see how we are seated with Christ.

We will break down the Ephesians 2:1-10 as follows:

1. Ephesians 2:1-2: What the Gentiles were
2. Ephesians 2:3: What the Jews were
3. Ephesians 2:4: God's intervention and His motive
4. Ephesians 2:5-6: What God has done
5. Ephesians 2:7: The purpose of God's actions
6. Ephesians 2:8-9: The method of God's actions
7. Ephesians 2:10: The result of God's actions

### 1. What the Gentiles were - Ephesians 2:1-2

"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." (English Standard version)

I will read Ephesians 2:2-9 from the New King James Version, but I have just read from the English Standard Version which, like most modern versions, correctly leaves out the reference to being made alive that the King James Version and New King James Version insert in italics near the start of Ephesians 2:1. We know that Paul is referring to the Gentiles because he refers to 'you'.

The Christians in the Ephesian church were mostly Gentiles. When Paul changes in Ephesians 2:3 to talk about 'we', he is referring to Jews like Himself.

The Gentile Ephesians, before they trusted in Christ, were dead. There was no possibility of them pleasing God, because they had no life at all with which they could respond to God's demands. Dead people do not hear, speak, move or respond in any way! That is how men and women are before God in their natural state. The sin that has been in all human beings since Adam first sinned has left us totally incapable of responding to God; totally dead. This is a different emphasis from the first three chapters of Romans. Those chapters explain how we all **actively** sin and are all guilty because of our actions. In Ephesians 2 the emphasis is not so much on what we **do**, that is sin, but on what we **are**, that is dead. The two thoughts are not contradictory. We were not absolved of guilt because we were dead, and so could not possibly respond to God. Our deadness was a guilty deadness. We ought to have responded to God. We were dead because of sin, not because God made us that way. We were not only **dead** in sins, we **walked** in them. That means, the whole way we lived was characterised by trespasses and sins.

The Ephesians were not unique in this; it was, and is, the normal course of this world. The reason for this is that the world is under the influence of Satan. In the time when the Epistle to the Ephesians was written most Gentiles worshipped idols, or false gods. According to 1 Corinthians 10:20 the sacrifices offered to idols are effectively offered to demons, so their worshippers came under Satan's influence. Not many people in the West offer sacrifices to false gods today (although many still do in other parts of the world) but Satan still influences culture generally, and controls men and women individually, by making them captives through sinful behaviour. Unsaved Gentiles today are still disobedient to God and that disobedience is still manipulated by Satan's work today.

### 2. What the Jews were - Ephesians 2:3

"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

If the Ephesians were beginning to wonder if Paul was setting himself and the other Jews on a higher natural plane than Gentiles like themselves, he quickly dispels the notion. The Jews might not worship idols and demons but they lived, like the rest of the world, in disobedience. They had God's good law but they lived according to the lusts of their sinful nature and did whatever their bodies and minds craved for. Like religious people today, their principles and codes were good, but their hearts and patterns of behaviour were sinful. So in their very nature they were as much "children of wrath" as the rest of mankind.

In short, the whole of the human race, Jews as much as Gentiles, were dead before God and incapable of the smallest response to Him. Sounds pretty terminal doesn't it? What a wonderful turnaround happens in t Ephesians 2:4!

### 3. God's intervention and His motive - Ephesians 2:4

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

Experts in grammar call the word 'but' the adversative conjunction. It is a conjunction because it joins two parts of the sentence. It is adversative because the two parts it joins are in opposition or contrast to each other. What a glorious contrast between the dead men of Ephesians 2:1-3 and the living God, who is rich in mercy, in Ephesians 2:4! God steps into the hopeless situation and everything is transformed! The phrase 'But God' appears quite a few times in the Bible: you might want to look them up some time in a concordance or a software version of the Bible. Some of these 'divine adversatives' are very dramatic, perhaps none more than this one.

Just when everything seems impossible, God arrives and light dawns. What was God's motive for this dramatic intervention? "His great love". This is characteristic of the way that everything starts with God in the epistle to the Ephesians. Paul could have said "because of our great need" or "because there was nobody else who could help". Both are correct enough in their way, but the primary motive, the deepest root cause, is God's great love. We are left in no doubt as to whether or not we are included in the scope of this love, because Ephesians 2:4 ends, "with which He loved us."

### 4. What God has done - Ephesians 2:5-6

Ephesians 2:4 may have ended with the words "with which He loved us" but that is not the end of Paul's sentence. It rolls on into Ephesians 2:5-6.

"Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Paul has not 'backed off' on his assessment of our state without Christ. God has not examined us more closely and found a spark of life that had not been noticed before that He can nurse back into strength. We were still "dead in trespasses". But neither does God instil a bit of life and then start loving us. It was precisely when we were dead in trespasses that God loved us! The fact that God loved us says absolutely nothing about our attractiveness and speaks volumes about the kind of God He is. The rest of Ephesians 2:5-6 tells us three things that God has done for us, and we are connected with Christ in all of them.

- a. Made us alive together with Christ
- b. Raised us up together with Christ
- c. Seated us together with Christ

#### a. *Made us alive together with Christ*

This is the first and essential thing we needed. We were completely dead; nothing else could profit us until we were made alive. There are a couple of details worth noticing here. First, the Gentiles and Jews who, although united in disobedience and death, were previously separated and opponents to each other, are now together in life.

They receive life on exactly the same basis, God's grace, and are now together. Second, both the life and the togetherness are 'with Christ'. We were dead and Christ was alive. Then Christ became dead, by laying down His life. Referring back to Ephesians 1:19-20 we read, "The working of [God's] mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." God's great power made Christ alive from the dead but it also made us alive together with Christ. We were so inextricably linked to Christ when He died for us, that when He was made alive again, we were made alive with Him.

*b. Raised us up together with Christ*

God's actions did not end with making us alive. The raising of Lazarus from the dead, recorded in John 11:38-44, is a lovely pointer to the coming resurrection of Jesus in John 20:1-31, but it is a fundamentally different kind of resurrection. Lazarus continued to live on earth after his resurrection, and presumably died again some years later. Jesus rose with a new order of life completely and, after forty days, ascended back to heaven. Jesus was not only raised up from the grave, He was also raised up to heaven. Since the Ephesians (and believers in Christ today) were inextricably linked to Christ, when Christ was raised up to heaven, they were raised up together with Him.

*c. Seated us together with Christ*

Let me now go back and extend my quote from Ephesians 1:19-20 slightly. "The working of [God's] mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." Christ was not only raised to heaven, He was seated there. In other words, He made Himself at home there. He does not have the status of a visitor, an honoured guest perhaps, but at some point having to leave and return to a home elsewhere. He is sat down there as a resident in the family home, with full title and rights to remain there. That Christ should have this place is not surprising: He was always the Son of the house.

That our links to Christ are so intimate that **we** have been seated there with Him is astounding! People who were dead in trespasses are now at home in the presence of God, with every right and title to remain there.

Of course, physically, in time and space, we are still living on earth. We might say that God is looking forward to the future when we will be seated in heaven with Christ, but that is more the viewpoint of the Epistle to the Colossians. Ephesians describes us as emphatically seated in the heavenlies right now. The idea is that Christ is actually seated in the heavenlies today and, because God sees us as vitally linked to His Son, we are therefore in the heavenlies today as well. We are so closely linked to Christ that, as far as God is concerned, where Christ is we are.

**5. The purpose of God's actions - Ephesians 2:7**

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

This is rather interesting! We might have thought that God's chief purpose was our salvation and blessing. It seems rather, that God's chief purpose is the demonstration of His own great grace and how that grace is centred on Jesus Christ. This should not really be a surprise when we remember again how the whole book is focused on God's working through Christ. This should serve as a useful correction of perspective for us. We are all very self-centred. That is not just a criticism of today's society; it is a direct result of the fall of man. The fall involved mankind choosing independence from God. God was pushed out of the middle of our universe and we replaced Him. The effects of this seismic shift were very far reaching and deep. So deep, that even after we have been saved, perhaps for many years, we tend to still think as if we were the centre of everything. We think that God had a plan for salvation because we needed saving, and that God wants us in heaven because that will be a great blessing for us.

While we **did** need saving and heaven **will** be a great blessing for us, Ephesians 2:7, and the rest of Ephesians, help us to see that actually God is at the centre of His own universe and that His plans are devised for reasons founded primarily in the display of His greatness and love.

**6. The method of God's actions - Ephesians 2:8-9**

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

The fact that salvation is by grace was first mentioned in Ephesians 2:5, but it is here in Ephesians 2:8 that the theme is expounded. Somebody might think that the first part of Ephesians 2:8 shows two parties acting and contributing their elements to salvation. "By grace ... through faith" could be taken to mean that God contributes grace (admittedly the largest and most vital component) and we contribute faith (perhaps just a mustard seed's worth!), Matthew 17:20, and the two together produce salvation. Paul will not allow this logic to stand! He insists that even the Ephesians' faith is 'not of themselves' but a 'gift of God'. Attempts to connect the phrase 'not of yourselves' to grace rather than faith, fail, not only on grammatical grounds, but because describing grace as 'not of yourselves' but 'the gift of God' is hopelessly, repeatedly stating the obvious. By the very definition of the word grace you could never think it was 'from yourself' - grace is an undeserved gift from another. If we remember that Ephesians 2 started by showing that we were dead (Ephesians 2:1), it will become obvious that we could never produce faith from within ourselves - we had absolutely no power to do so. We are dependent, even for our faith, on the gracious giving of God.

It was doubly essential that our salvation had no element of doing works - even a special work called 'having faith'. Firstly, as we have just thought, because we were incapable of any works apart from sinful ones. Secondly, because the only person permitted to boast (or glory) in the production of our salvation is to be God! God guards His glory and His sole right to be praised very jealously, and has determined that not even the slightest reason for human boasting will be allowed.

## 7. The result of God's actions - Ephesians 2:10

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

Having completely excluded works in Ephesians 2:9, Paul introduces two works in Ephesians 2:10! The first works are the workmanship of God. This is a very special kind of work; it is the work of creation. This underlines what we said earlier about Christ, and by connection ourselves, being made alive with a new kind of life. God created mankind in Eden and then, as a result of sin, man died. When we were made alive with Christ it was not to be raised back to our status in Eden - a restoration of the same kind of life as the one lost. Rather, it was a whole new work of creation; a new creation. In this workmanship we were not just created **by** Christ Jesus but **in** Christ Jesus. This fits in with what we were considering in Ephesians 2:5-6, and re-emphasises that our life is now of the same kind as Christ's. We used to descend from Adam; we now descend from Christ.

This introduces the possibility of the second kind of works in Ephesians 2:10. If we now have a new life like that of Christ, then there is the possibility, in fact there is the necessity, that we should do good works, just as Christ did. I say necessity because it is impossible that a life like Christ's would **not** produce good works, and Ephesians 2:10 plainly states that God Himself has prepared them for us to do. This does not contradict Paul's assertion in Ephesians 2:9 that works are excluded. Those were the works of a person dead in trespasses and sins. Such works can never contribute the smallest amount to our salvation. Once we have been saved and given a brand new kind of life, good works are the expected result of that new life. Indeed, if there were no good works it would be conclusive evidence that no new life existed.

## 8. Conclusion

Let's conclude by briefly reviewing what we have discovered this morning.

- The entire human race was dead in trespasses and sins. We were all subject to God's wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- But God loved us, despite our deadness, and was determined to intervene. (Ephesians 2:4)
- God's intervention was dramatic - He made us alive, raised us up and seated us in the heavenlies. All in Christ. (Ephesians 2:5-6)
- God's purpose in doing this was to demonstrate His own goodness. (Ephesians 2:7)
- God acted in pure grace; in no way at all were we active in our own salvation. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- The result of the new life we have been given, and our position as seated in the heavenlies, is to be the performance of the good works God has given us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

We will end with a prayer.

*"God and Father, thank You for Your wonderful grace to us. We were as dead as the Ephesians when You loved us and gave Your Son for us. We are overawed by Your blessings; astounded that we should be regarded as seated in the heavenly places with Christ. Please teach and strengthen us to perform those particular good works that You have especially assigned us to do. We ask in Jesus' name, with whom You have so closely associated us. Amen."*

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