

Coming Alive in Christ

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1–10

Code: 1908

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ephesians discusses the ramifications of a believer's being in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3-14 the apostle Paul presents God's master plan from eternity past. In verses 15-23 he prays that believers would understand that plan and all that it means to be in Christ. However in chapter 2 he moves from eternity past into the present. He describes the process of salvation--the miracle that brought us into God's eternal plan.

Understanding God's Power

The apostle Paul wanted believers to understand "the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." To help us understand how tremendous that power is, he illustrates it in verse 20: It is the same power that "raised [Christ] from the dead, and set him at [God's] right hand." That's Paul's first illustration of God's power in Ephesians, and we already discussed it in detail. But in chapter 2 Paul gives a second illustration: that power raised you from the dead and exalted you to sit you at the right hand of God with Christ (vv. 5-6). So to understand God's power we must first look at the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, and then at our own resurrection and exaltation.

The natural response to that last thought is: "What do you mean I have been raised from the dead and exalted? When did that happen?" It already happened spiritually and will occur physically in the future when your body will be redeemed, resurrected, and exalted (Rom. 8:23). But God already has accomplished the resurrection and exaltation of your inner man. That's the miracle Paul discusses in chapter 2. In so doing he presents a great picture of the doctrine of salvation.

LESSON

As we examine Ephesians 2:1-10 we will see that Paul presents the believer's salvation in terms of

his past (vv. 1-3), present (vv. 4-6), and future (vv. 7-10). But within that general context I want you to see six aspects of salvation.

I. SALVATION IS FROM SIN (vv. 1-3)

"You ... who were dead in trespasses and sins; in which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom also we all had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

There is probably no clearer statement on the sinfulness of man in the New Testament than those three verses. Paul's first point is that we were sinners and that meant we were dead.

A. The Alienation of Man (v.1a)

"You ... who were dead."

That phrase describes the condition of every person. We all were dead. If you're a Christian, that was but a past reality. If you're not a Christian, this is your present condition--you're dead. Ephesians 4:18 explains what that means: It's to be "alienated from the life of God." It doesn't refer to physical deadness, but to spiritual deadness. An unbeliever is dead to God.

1. Physical death

Physical death is best defined as an inability to respond to stimulus. A dead person can't react to anything. For example some years ago while I was in my office, a hysterical little boy banged on my door. Through his tears he pleaded with me to come with him. I followed him as he ran down the street to his house. When I arrived, his mother met me at the door. With tears streaming down her face, she pointed to a bedroom and said, "My baby is dead." I walked into the room and lying on the bed was a lifeless little baby about three months old. I asked her if she tried to revive the baby and she said she had. Then she picked up the limp body, caressed the baby to her breast, kissed it, and cried tears all over its little head, but the baby did not respond to her. An ambulance soon arrived, and the attendants were unable to revive the infant. The baby was dead.

In terms of human relationships perhaps the strongest stimulus possible is the love of a mother for her baby. When that mother couldn't get a response out of her little infant, that was a prime example of physical death--the inability to respond.

2. Spiritual death

Likewise spiritual death is an inability to respond to stimulus. God's love draws no response because a spiritually dead person is alienated from the life of God. He has no capacity to respond to God. But unlike a physically dead person, he is animate. The nineteenth-century Scottish commentator John Eadie described it as a case of "death walking" ([Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians](#)

[Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1977], p. 121). Spiritually dead people are like zombies--they don't know they're dead and they're still going through the motions of living.

Jesus combined the concepts of physical and spiritual death in Matthew 8. He called a certain man to follow Him and be His disciple, but the man said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father" (v. 21). But Jesus said, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Jesus was saying, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead." Implied is that He had better plans for the man. In 1 Timothy 5:6 Paul refers to the widow who lives for pleasure as being "dead while she liveth."

B. The Activity of Man (v. 1b)

"In trespasses and sins."

Man is not dead because he commits sin but because he was born sinful. Think of it this way: A man is not a liar because he lies; he lies because he is a liar by nature. Jesus said, "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man" (Mark 7:20). Man is dead and lives in a state of sinfulness. The Greek word translated "in" is called a locative of sphere, which refers to the sphere in which we live. Thus Paul is saying that man is dead because he lives in the realm of sin.

1. Sin described

a

) Hamartia--This Greek word, translated "sins" in Ephesians 2:1, is a hunter's word that means "to miss the target" or "to miss the mark."

b

) Paraptoma--This Greek word, translated "trespasses" in verse 1, means "to slip," "to fall," or "to go the wrong direction."

Commentators through the years have tried to make distinctions between those two words, but I believe they are two ways of looking at the same thing.

2. Sin defined

a

) Missing God's standard

Sin is a failure to hit God's target. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Sin is a failure to glorify God. Romans 1:21 says, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God."

When the Bible says that every person is a sinner, it doesn't mean that everyone is at the same level of sinfulness. Twenty dead corpses lying side by side could all be at various degrees of decay. So it is with man: All are dead, but there are variances in decadence. Ultimately sin is not an issue of decay, but a question of falling short of something.

We all understand that robbers, murderers, rapists, and liars are sinners. But sin is not so much an issue of what you do, but of what you fail to do. And man is a sinner because he fails to glorify God. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus says, "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect." Man fails at that point, too. First Peter 1:16 says we're to be that way "because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). Man falls short of glory, holiness, and perfection. There may be different levels of morality and different degrees of decadence, but every man falls short.

How Far Can You Jump?

Suppose we had a contest to see who could jump to Catalina Island from the beach at Los Angeles. You even could have as long a run as you want. When we jumped each of us would land at different spots in the water, but none of us would get to Catalina. The same thing is true spiritually. There are different levels of human attainment and different standards of morality, but no one can reach God's glory, perfection, and holiness. That can be attained only through Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is imputed to us when we are saved.

b) Measuring man's failure

Men and women try to jump to perfection, but they land in the sea of sin. Behavioral sins are the result of man's failure to reach God's standard.

(1) The recognition of human good

There are many people in this world we might say are good. You might know a non-Christian who is a great humanitarian and a wonderful father. He loves his wife and children. There certainly isn't anything wrong with that.

(a) Luke 6:33--Jesus said, "If ye do good to them who do good to you, what thanks have ye? For sinners do the same." Indeed, sinners do good, but Jesus still identified them as sinners. In God's eyes sin isn't an issue of what people do for others. You can't claim to be righteous just because you do good to others. Doing good to others doesn't help a person live a holy and perfect life, which is God's standard.

(b) Luke 11:13--Jesus said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" People give good gifts to their children, yet the Lord characterizes them as evil. Their evil is not manifested in what they do--giving good gifts to their children--but in what they don't do and can't do--bringing glory and honor to God.

(c) Acts 28:2--Paul and company had been shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Luke said that the natives showed them "extraordinary kindness" (NASB). Ungodly pagans showed great kindness to Paul, but good works are not enough to please God.

(2) The conviction by the Holy Spirit

In John 16:8 Jesus says to His disciples, "When he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin." The Holy Spirit would come and convict people of sin. Verse 9 specifies what sin: "Because they believe not on me." Men don't live to the glory of God, and they are not perfect or holy. Why? Because they don't believe in Jesus Christ. No matter what else they might do, they're

floundering in the ocean a long way from the goal. You can't please God if you don't believe in Jesus Christ (John 5:22-23).

Man is dead--dead because of his inability to reach God's standard. He is a death-walking zombie manifesting a total inability to accomplish God's standard, even though he manifests moral goodness from time to time.

C. The Atmosphere of Man (v. 2)

1. The course of the world (v. 2a)

"In which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world [Gk., kosmos, "age"]."

Man is a victim of the spirit of the age, but he frequently claims to be doing exactly what he wants to do. One of my football coaches claimed to have become a Christian but said he was still going to do whatever he wanted. I told him that he wasn't doing what he wanted but what the world dictated. He was walking according to the course of this age.

a
) Defined

Kosmos doesn't refer to the physical world, but to the ideological world of sin--the evil world system. The spiritual zombie indulges in the sins of the times. He lives according to the world's current standards. He is in complete harmony with the zeitgeist--the spirit of the age.

Satan, the prince of this world (John 12:31), dominates the kosmos and pressures man to succumb to what the system tells him to do. That is total depravity--dead men walking in sin according to the spirit of the age. They are walking in a circle they can't escape from on their own.

b
) Demonstrated

What is the spirit of the age? I think three things best characterize our age.

(1) Humanism--This philosophy suggests that you do your own thing (at the expense of others). You're the boss and forget all else.

(2) Materialism--This philosophy says we live to get more money and possessions. Many Christians find it hard to resist.

(3) Sex--Everything from a to z is promoted with sex. You practically have to drive with your eyes closed to avoid billboards that contain overt sexual overtones!

One writer said that we don't have even the morals of a barnyard. Humanism, materialism, and sex are the spirit of our age.

2. The prince of the power of the air (v. 2b)

"According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience."

a

) His identity

The prince (Gk., archos) is none other than Satan. The world has its archos, but we have the kephale (head)-- Jesus Christ. Satan, the leader of the demons, rules over the world system. That doesn't mean he indwells everyone as indwelt Judas (John 13:29). But it does mean he is behind the influences and trends in the world. His demons carry out his objectives, whether they are secular or religious.

b

) His influence

The Greek word translated "air" in verse 2 could refer to the atmosphere around the earth--the first heaven. (The second heaven is the stellar atmosphere and the third heaven is God's domain). Some people believe that Satan exists around the earth in the first heaven, fighting holy angels and leading his demons. Occasionally he may even enter the third heaven to accuse us before the throne of God as he did Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7).

But "air" can also refer to the realm of ideas. We often say there's a certain air in the room when we want to refer to an attitude. Just as "world" refers to an ideology, "air" is most likely the same. Satan functions not only in the physical atmosphere, but also in the ideological realm. He promotes his concepts and breeds his ideas. He is behind the whole system, which is straight from hell.

Satan is "the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). He draws man into active disobedience against God.

D. The Attributes of Man (v. 3)

"Among whom also we all had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

The death walker meanders through a system controlled by Satan. He functions only in response to his flesh. The Greek word translated "lusts" (epithumia) refers to strong, evil passions. The Greek word translated "desires" (thelema) means "drives." So the passion turns into a drive. Men are driven to fulfill "the desires of the flesh [his fallen nature] and of the mind." So man is physically and mentally driven into active sin and trespasses. He follows the pattern of disobedience when his lusts develop into drives that compel him to fulfill what his body and mind demand. By nature he is a child of wrath, just like everyone is born as. As such he is the target of God's judgment. That concludes a vivid description of man's total depravity.

II. SALVATION IS BY LOVE (v. 4)

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us."

It is God who rescues man from a state of living death. He is rich (Gk. plousios, "overabounding") with mercy for the sinner. If we got what we deserved we'd be in trouble. But God is merciful, holding back what we deserve.

He does that because of His "great love with which he loved us." Salvation is based on love. God doesn't save people based on their worthiness; He chooses them based on His love. His intrinsic, essential attribute of love manifests itself to us in His grace and mercy. Love is His motive. He reaches out to vile, sinful, godless, ungrateful, unworthy, unholy, destitute, depraved human beings engulfed in sins and trespasses in the service of Satan.

A Sin Against Love

Man's sin is not so much a crime against God's law as it is a sin against His love. Suppose someone was driving too fast on a neighborhood street and killed a little child playing in the street. He would be charged with manslaughter and speeding. Then he would be tried and probably found guilty. If so, he would either have to pay a fine or be imprisoned. After paying his fine or serving out his sentence, the law would be satisfied. But that's true only regarding sin against the law.

What about the little boy's mother? Could he ever make up for the loss of her son by paying a fine or serving a sentence? No. From her perspective he sinned against her love, not against the law. The only way he could ever be restored to her would be if she offered him free and unconditional forgiveness. And that is precisely what God has done. Man has not only sinned against His law, but killed His Son as well. And he continues to do so by his constant rejection and open defiance of Him. Yet God reaches out and offers unconditional and complete forgiveness to those who accept it.

III. SALVATION RESULTS IN LIFE (v. 5)

"Even when we were dead in sins, [He] hath made us alive together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)."

The one thing a dead man needs most is life. And that's what God provides. If you ever doubt the power of God in your life, remember it is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and you from your sin. If you're not sure God can get you into heaven or that He can get you out of the grave

at the resurrection, just remember that He already raised you spiritually. The physical resurrection is the easier task. We can have confidence in God's power.

When you became a Christian, you ceased being alienated from the life of God--you became alive. You became sensitive to God. You could understand the Bible because the Holy Spirit was in your life teaching you. You had a reason to live. You felt God at work in your life. You knew Christ. There was an immediate brotherhood with other Christians. You became the possessor of eternal life.

When God raised Christ from the grave, He made us alive together with Him. In a sense we were with Him when He rose from the dead, and that means God's power has already been displayed on our behalf.

IV. SALVATION IS WITH A PURPOSE (vv. 6-7)

A. To Seat Us in the Heavens (v. 6)

"[God] hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

1. The fact of our exaltation

When God raised us from the dead He didn't leave us in the cemetery. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was still wrapped in his grave clothes, so Jesus said, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44). Christ first performed the miracle of resurrection for us, then He did a second miracle: He exalted us to a seat in the heavenly places. And that is a past-tense reality--we already are seated there positionally.

Philippians 3:20 says that our "citizenship is in heaven." Because we are saved we are no longer of this world. We have eternal life. We are alive to God; we just live in this dead world. But our life is in heaven, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). That's why Ephesians 1:3 says He "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

2. The focus of our exaltation

To be in heavenly places obviously doesn't mean your physical body is now in heaven. However your mind exists in God's domain. All your blessings are there. The Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are there. All believers who died are there. Heaven is your home--it's your world.

B. To Shower Us with Kindness (v. 7)

"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

God saved you so He could be kind to you forever. But why would He be kind to people who don't deserve it? Because God is love (1 John 4:8), and love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4). God saved us not only to keep us out of hell, but also to shower us with the riches of His grace.

From the moment of salvation, and continuing throughout eternity, we are the recipients of "the exceeding riches of his grace." God doesn't withhold anything--He gives us everything through Jesus Christ. After pouring out His grace on us, God shows us off to the angels so that they can praise Him for His grace and give Him glory. God's glory is at stake, and He will never allow that to be diminished. If He receives glory by pouring out His grace on you, He will do it, and has done it.

V. SALVATION IS THROUGH FAITH (vv. 8-9)

"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast."

If we were responsible for our own salvation we would receive the glory for it. But Christ did all the work to accomplish salvation by dying on the cross. Just before He died He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). So the glory all belongs to God.

A. Faith Illustrated

We're all creatures of faith. We live by faith every day. Every time you pop the lid off a can of soda and drink it, that's an act of faith. You don't have any idea what's really in that can. Whenever you eat in a restaurant you can't be sure of what they are serving you. You have to exhibit faith every time you turn on your faucet and drink the water.

The faith that is basic to human nature is what God uses to draw you to Himself. If you can have faith in the things I just described, you ought to be able to trust the God of the universe. The essence of faith is believing and accepting His gift of salvation.

B. Faith Induced

The moment you accept God's gift is the moment you come alive spiritually. If you are a Christian, God released His power in your life to accomplish the work of salvation. You don't ever need to question God's power--you've already seen it at work. According to verses 1-3 you were dead. But now you are saved through faith. You didn't do it; it was God's gift to you. If works on your part were involved, you would boast; but the privilege of boasting about your salvation belongs to God.

You can breathe spiritually because God slapped you on the backside to make you breathe. You can hear with the ear of faith because God unstopped your ears. Salvation is not the result of your confirmation, baptism, communion, church attendance or membership, giving to the church or to charity, keeping the Ten Commandments, living by the Sermon on the Mount, believing in God, being a good neighbor, or living a respectable life. None of those things will ever allow anyone into heaven. Hell will be full of people who do those things thinking that will save them.

VI. SALVATION PRODUCES GOOD WORKS (v. 10)

"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

A. The Manifestation of Good Works

The result of salvation is good works. In John 15:8 Jesus says, "In this is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." When God saves you He wants to see good works produced in your life because that manifests His power. His power saved you, and when your good works reveal that, He receives glory.

B. The Meaning of Good Works

The Bible refers to many different kinds of works. There are the works of the law, which cannot save anyone (Gal. 2:16; 3:11); the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21); the works of darkness (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11); and dead works (Heb. 6:1). However none of those are the kind of works Ephesians 2:10 describes. Paul was referring to the works that are the result of salvation, not the works that men do in a futile effort to save themselves.

C. The Masterpiece of Good Works

The Greek word translated "workmanship" in Ephesians 2:10 came to mean "masterpiece." We are God's masterpiece. From the beginning His design was to conform us to Christ, our good works being the proof of our salvation. God's power is at work in your life, shaping you into the image of Jesus Christ. You are God's masterpiece!

CONCLUSION

Who is the true Christian? The one who does good works. Many people claim to be saved, but only those who do good as a result of their salvation to the glory of God are truly saved. I hope you are one of them.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are Paul's two illustrations of God's power in Ephesians 1-2?
2. According to Ephesians 2:1 and 4:18, what is the root of man's problem?
3. Explain commentator John Eadie's term "death-walking".

4. What two concepts did Jesus combine in Matthew 8:21?
5. Are men spiritually dead because they commit sin or because they are born sinful? Explain.
6. Translate and define the Greek words hamartia and paraptoma.
7. What is the biblical definition of sin?
8. What does man fall short of?
9. Since Jesus did not deny that people do good things, why are those same people referred to as "sinners"?
10. What does the phrase "the course of this world" refer to (Eph. 2:2)?
11. What three words characterize the spirit of our age?
12. Who is "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2)?
13. What does "air" refer to?
14. What is the difference between the "lusts" of the flesh and the "desires" of the flesh (Eph. 2:3)?
15. God's grace is His giving us what we don't deserve. Contrast that with His mercy.
16. Illustrate the difference between a sin against the law and a sin against love. What is the only way that a sin against love can be reconciled?
17. In what way have we been raised from the dead and seated in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6)?
18. Why did God save us (Eph. 2:7)?
19. Explain why we all can be described as creatures of faith.
20. Who is responsible for your salvation? Explain.
21. What is the importance of good works in the life of a Christian (Eph. 2:10)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. As you do, substitute personal pronouns in the appropriate places. How does that make you want to respond to God? With those verses in mind, are we to view the unsaved

as our enemies or as prisoners of the enemy? Why? How can having a proper perspective of the unsaved change our attitudes toward them? Do you have an unsaved acquaintance whom you've been treating as an enemy? Ask the Lord to help you see him or her as someone for whom He died.

2. Read Colossians 3 and note the characteristics of the old man and the new man. Write down some personal characteristics of sin in your life before you were saved. Next to those characteristics, record the specific changes that have taken place since you became a Christian. Thank God for His transforming power.

3. The majority of unbelievers think they will go to heaven if they are good enough, or if their good deeds outweigh their bad ones. How would you illustrate to them the error of that kind of thinking (see p. 4)? To prepare yourself to respond to the prevalent error of salvation by works, memorize one of the following passages: Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

4. According to Ephesians 2:10, why will good works be present in the life of a truly regenerated person? According to Matthew 5:16 and John 15:8, why do Christians do good works? How do our good works sometimes fall short of their intended purpose? Ask God to make you more aware of the times when your good works glorify you more than they glorify Him.

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