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God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of Ephesians

Alive In Christ: Discovering Our Identity & Purpose

Part 3: "From Death to Life:

God's Great Rescue Story."

Today we continue our historical and chronological journey through the New Testament with Part 2 of The letter to the Ephesians. This Letter was written by the Apostle Paul during his first Roman imprisonment, around AD 60–62. Paul composed four letters now known as the Prison Epistles: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philipians

Today, as we continue our series “*Alive in Christ: Discovering Our Identity & Purpose*,” we look at verses 1 through 10 under the banner:

***“From Death to Life:
God's Great Rescue Story.”***

Everyone enjoys a great rescue story and in this text we recount the greatest rescue story ever told. In these ten verses, Paul outlines four distinct works:

1. Sin's work ***AGAINST*** us,
2. God's work ***FOR*** us,
3. God's work ***IN*** us.
4. God's Work ***THROUGH*** us.

If you understand this journey, you will never look at yourself, your salvation, or your purpose the same way again. Let's read today's scripture passage.

Ephesians 2:1-10... ¹ *Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. he (The Devil) is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. ⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. ⁸ God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.*

Some material adapted from Warren Wiesbe 'Bible Exposition Commentary.

I. Sin's Work Against Us (Ephesians 2:1–3)

Look at verses 1 through 3:

“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world... All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.”

The Graveyard of the Old Life

"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins..." (v. 1)

Before we can grasp the heights of grace, Paul takes us to the graveyard. Unsaved humanity is not merely struggling, sick, or uneducated—the biblical diagnosis is **dead in sin**.

- **Controlled by the World** (v. 2a) — Conforming to the culture's corrupt mold.
- **Controlled by the Devil** (v. 2b) — Influenced by the spirit of disobedience.
- **Controlled by the Flesh** (v. 3) — Dictated by fallen appetites, helpless to save ourselves, and under condemnation.

Takeaway: A corpse cannot revive itself. We didn't need a life coach or moral reformation; we needed a **resurrection**.

An evangelist once preached a sermon titled *“Why Your Dog Does What It Does.”* A huge crowd of dog lovers showed up! And his opening line was simple: *“A dog behaves like a dog because he has a dog’s nature.”* Why does a sinner sin? Because he has the nature of a sinner! You cannot transplant morality into a dead nature and expect life.

Verse 3 says we were *“by nature children of wrath.”* Condemned already. The sentence had been passed, and we stood before a holy God with zero defense. That was Sin’s work against us: dead, disobedient, and doomed.

II. God's Work For Us (Eph.2:4–9)

If Ephesians stopped at verse 3, it would be the darkest tragedy ever written... *“...subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.”*

However in verse 4-9 we move from the Graveyard to the **Land of Resurrected Life**... ⁴*“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead!”*

Those two words—**“BUT GOD”**—are the pivot upon which eternity turns! When we were powerless, helpless, and hopeless in the tomb, God stepped in! Why did He do it? Not because we were attractive. Not because we promised to clean up our act. He did it out of His **mercy** and His **grace**.

Mercy is God *not* giving us the punishment we deserved.

Grace is God *giving* us the riches we could never earn.

And notice what God did for us:

1. HE BROUGHT US BACK TO LIFE (v. 5):

"That even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved" !

2. HE SEATED US IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS (v. 6): *"For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus".*

3. HE SAVED US BY GRACE (v. 8): *"God saved you by His grace when you believed".* Salvation is an unearned gift (*charis*), not earned based on human effort.

Salvation is a gift, not a trophy. You don't work for a gift; you simply open your empty hands and receive it.

God did the work on the cross;
Jesus cried *"It is finished!"* and tore the veil.

Takeaway: Calvary is God's finished work **for** you. You can add nothing to it; you dare take nothing from it

III. GOD'S WORK IN US (Ephesians 2:10a)

Now we move into The Master's Workshop:

"For we are God's masterpiece [workmanship]. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus..." (v. 10a)

1. You Are God's Poem (*Poiema*)

The Greek word translated *masterpiece* or *workmanship* is *poiema*—the origin of our English word **poem**. You are not an assembly-line product stamped out by mass production. You are God's custom-crafted artwork, designed with intentionality, beauty, and redemptive purpose.

2. The Tools in God's Workshop

To shape us into the image of Christ, the Master Craftsman uses three primary tools:

- **The Word of God:** Cleansing, renewing, and feeding our inner thoughts (1 Thess. 2:13).
- **Prayer:** The conduit through which the Holy Spirit releases power into our daily lives (Eph. 3:16).
- **Trials and Suffering:** The chisel God uses to chip away pride and self-reliance (1 Peter 4:12–14).

Moses spent 40 years in Pharaoh's courts thinking he was somebody, 40 years in the desert learning he was nobody, and 40 years in the wilderness discovering what God can do with a nobody. God had to work in Moses before He could deliver a nation through him.

3. Take Off the Graveclothes!

When Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, Lazarus stepped out alive—but still bound from head to foot in stinking graveclothes (John 11:44). Jesus said, *"Loose him, and let him go!"*

The Application: You have received resurrection life! Why are you still wearing the rotten graveclothes of your old temper, old bitterness, and old habits? **Take off the grave clothes; put on the grace clothes!**

Takeaway: God is currently at work *in* you to conform you to the character of Jesus Christ.

IV: GOD'S WORK THROUGH US (Eph. 2:10b)

The Privilege of Joining God in His Work

"...so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (v. 10b)

Saved Unto Good Works (Not By Them)

John Calvin famously wrote: *"It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone."*

- Good works are not the **root** of salvation; they are the **fruit**.
- Good works are not the purchase price; they are the **receipt** showing the debt has been canceled.

A Path Paved with Divine Appointments

Paul says these good things were *"planned for us long ago"* (pre-ordained / prepared).

God did not save you and hand you a blank calendar. He has pre-paved your life with specific divine assignments - moments to show kindness, speak truth, encourage the weary, and share Christ.

The Heart of Good Works:

Three Reasons We Do Good Works:

1. **Out of Love and Gratitude** We serve not to earn God's favor — we already have it completely in Christ. We serve because we are overwhelmed by what He has already done. Every act of kindness is simply love returning to its source.
2. **Out of Obedience and Purpose** Look at that stunning phrase: *"good things he planned for us long ago."* God did not save you and then leave you to figure out the rest on your own. He has already **pre-paved the path** of your life with divine appointments — moments, conversations, and opportunities specifically designed for you to walk in. You are not wandering through life looking for meaning.

3. Out of Evangelistic Testimony Here is where it gets deeply practical. Your good works are not just personal acts of devotion — they are **public declarations of the gospel**.

Takeaway: God invites you to be His partner on earth. He worked *for* you, He is working *in* you, and now He wants to work *through* you to touch a broken world.

Conclusion & Invitation

Let's take inventory of where we stand today. Look at the four works:

1. **Sin worked against us** to make us dead in the graveyard.

Is **sin working against you** because you are still outside of Christ? Come to Him today.

2. **God worked for us** on the cross to raise us to the throne.

Have you trusted **God's work for you** on the cross?

3. **God is working in us** to make us His masterpiece.

Are you yielding to **God's work in you**—trading the graveclothes of the past for the character of Christ?

4. **God is working through us** to touch a broken world.

Are you stepping into **God's work through you**—living out the prepared good works that bring glory to His name?

Where are you in that story?

If you are a believer:

Why are you still sitting in the cemetery? Why are you still holding onto the graveclothes of the old life? You are seated with Christ in heavenly places. You are His poem, His masterpiece. Yield to the chisel of the Master Sculptor today. Let Him work *in* you, so that tomorrow, He can do mighty things *through* you.

If you are here today and you have never trusted Christ:

You don't need a self-help program. You don't need to try harder. You need resurrection! The same Savior who stood outside the tomb of Lazarus is standing outside your heart right now, calling your name. Step out of the graveyard! Receive the gift of His grace by faith today.

INVITATION