

By Grace Through Faith

Ephesians 2:1-10

Rev. Brian Bill

January 27-28, 2024

Last weekend, we were in the Chicago suburbs to witness our grandson Mack's baby dedication while you heard Pastor Chris do a superb job preaching on the sanctity of life with both conviction and compassion!

On Saturday, we pulled into a drive-through, and I placed our order. When I came to the first window, I used my debit card to pay the cashier. For some reason, the line didn't move for about five minutes (imagine that). I found myself getting frustrated, so I tried to focus on other things. When we finally got to the second window, I handed my debit card to the worker. She looked at me quizzically and said it was already paid for. I asked her who paid for it. We naturally assumed that someone in front of us blessed us, so we started waving to them and mouthing our thankfulness.

When I looked back inside the window, several employees were huddled up, pointing at me, and then looking at the screen. When the worker came back, she told me the person in front didn't pay for our order. I was totally confused and then I realized that I had already paid for it at the first window!

It's easy for me to get distracted and end up forgetting important details, especially as I get older. I submit that as we get older as Christians, it's easy to forget the essential truth of the gospel that everything has already been paid for by Christ.

The passage we'll be studying today contains the essence of the grace of the gospel and has been used by God to bring many to salvation. I pray that some of you will be saved today.

Please stand and let's read Ephesians 2:1-10 together.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² 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— ³ 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. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by

grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Here's a summary of the sermon in one sentence: *God saves dead sinners by His grace for His glory, leading us to deeds of service.*

This passage begins with our condition apart from Christ.

1. Our plight: We were dead in sin. Listen again to verse 1 and the first part of verse 2: *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...”* The word **“dead”** literally means a *“corpse.”* Ray Pritchard writes, *“When God looks down from heaven, the whole world looks like a cemetery to Him. All He sees are dead people. Above every corpse is a three-word epitaph: ‘DEAD THROUGH SIN.’”*

This is an absolute and universal statement, not a figure of speech. Life without Christ is a living death. One commentator remarked, *“Paul’s use of the metaphor of death is significant, as it allows for no middle ground; a person is either dead or alive.”*

The word **“trespasses”** refers to wrongdoing and was used of *“slipping and falling,”* like many of us have done this winter. The term **“sins”** refers to *“missing the mark.”* The Puritans called this, *“the exceeding sinfulness of sin.”*

Notice these terms are in the plural, which means we fall short repeatedly and continuously. In fact, we once **“walked”** or lived in our trespasses and sins, leading to death. In Genesis 2:17, God gave a warning to Adam to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: *“For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death...”*

According to verses 2-3, we were controlled by three enemy forces.

- **The world.** We followed *“the course of this world...”* Kent Hughes writes, *“Those without Christ are captive to the social and value system of this present age, which is hostile to Christ.”*

- **The devil.** We followed *“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...”* Satan is described as the *“prince of demons”* in Matthew 9:34 and the *“ruler of the world”* in John 12:31.
- **Our flesh.** The dead are corrupted from within as well. We once *“lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...”* I heard about a young girl who was disciplined by her mother for kicking her brother and pulling his hair. *“Sally,”* said her mother, *“Why did you let the devil make you kick your little brother and pull his hair?”* To which she answered, *“The devil made me kick him, but pulling his hair was my idea!”*

The world dominates the lost from *without*, the flesh influences from *within*, and the devil does his work from *beyond*.

As a result, we *“were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”* By nature, we are sinners who lead wretched and wayward lives, which leads to us being under the wrath of God. At this very moment, everyone who is not saved is facing an outpouring of God’s wrath. This is not a pleasant or very popular concept but according to John 3:36, it’s totally true: *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

Many churches have stopped preaching that everyone without Christ is spiritually dead, even removing God’s righteous wrath from sermons and Sunday School classes. They extol God’s love while excising His holiness, soft-pedaling sin, cheapening grace, elevating the goodness of humanity, and defaulting to psychobabble.

Brothers and sisters, we were not only dead, but we were also disobedient, depraved, and doomed because we were under God’s wrath. We were in a bad, bad spot. This is a hard message but unless we know we are dead apart from Christ, His death and resurrection will make no sense. If you don’t yet know Christ through the new birth, you are in a very precarious position right now. We must first know the bad news before the good news will make sense.

One of my seminary professors was Dr. Erwin Lutzer, pastor emeritus at Moody Church in Chicago. I had the privilege of being taught apologetics by him. He

also taught preaching courses. Every year he would take his students on a field trip to a local cemetery, have them gather around a tombstone, and tell one of the young preachers to “*preach the gospel to Mr. Smith here.*”

After allowing the student to stutter and stammer with his impromptu sermon for a few minutes, Dr. Lutzer starting preaching to Mr. Smith with great passion, concluding with these words, “*Sir, Jesus died for your sins, and you must put your faith in Him for salvation.*” When he had the full attention of his students, he took advantage of the teachable moment and said: “*This is no different than preaching the gospel to unsaved people. The Bible says that they are dead in their sins. You can preach your heart out, but nothing will happen unless God does a miracle to give them the life to listen.*”

Incidentally, I highly recommend one of Dr. Lutzer’s newest books called, *No Reason to Hide*. It’s available at the Café Resource Center. Dell Jensen is taking his Thursday morning men’s group through this book.

After allowing us to feel the full force of our deadness and our depravity, Paul celebrates how God has provided a solution.

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2. God’s provision: He makes us alive with Christ. In the midst of our helplessness and hopelessness, listen to these two potent words from the first part of verse 4, “***But God...***” These are two of the best words in the entire Bible, found some 45 different times. The word “***but***” serves as a contrast. We were dead...*but God!* We were serving sin...*but God!* We were disobedient...*but God!*

I think of Acts 7:9-10: “***And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him...***” Romans 5:8 says: “***But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***”

Are you in a storm right now? Remember, *But God*. Are you struggling? *But God*. Are you caught in a cycle of sin you can’t seem to break? *But God*. When you pray for Pastor Dan, remember...*but God!* Before giving up, say this phrase out loud as many times as you need to: *But God*. God always has a solution for our situation, no matter how severe it is. He loves to bring hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless. When it feels like there’s no way, Yahweh makes a way.

This past week, when I was thinking about this phrase, I saw a bumper sticker which says, “*But God*” on Lynn Johnson’s desk. Lynn is our Office Assistant and she received it from Christar, a mission agency. I went on christar.org/ButGod and found this information.

- More than 1.9 billion people are followers of Islam. *But God.*
- Over half a billion Buddhists still live without the hope of Christ. *But God.*
- 4.5 billion people don’t have access to the Word of God. *But God.*
- There are over 7,000 unreached people groups today. *But God.*

Speaking of Unreached Peoples, Emma Janacek is leading the *Movement Team* which exists to pray for those still unreached by the gospel. Contact the church office if you want more information.

As a way for us to be reminded that God is always at work, Lynn made some more *But God* cards. Feel free to pick one up at the Welcome Center or on the table near the south doors. You may want to put it on your desk, on your fridge, over your kitchen sink, on your bathroom mirror, or on the dash of your car. No matter what happens, get in the practice of quickly declaring, *But God!*

When we were dead in our sins, the rest of verse 4 declares, “***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us...***” God’s mercy is rich, and His love is great. I think of Psalm 51:1: “***According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.***”

Verse 5 tells that we are not only loved, but we are also given life: “***Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.***” We’re told a second time we were “*dead in our trespasses*” so there can be no doubt. We are not simply sick people needing help; we are dead people needing life. We have been quickened by Christ and have moved from death to life, all by His amazing grace, mercy, and love.

Jesus said it like this in John 5:25: “***Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.***” 1 John 3:14 says, “***We know that we have passed out of death into life.***”

We’ve been made alive together with Christ and according to verse 6, God has “***raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.***” We don’t need a realignment; we need a resurrection! One commentator

remarked, *“No one can crawl from a casket. He or she must be made alive together with Christ.”* We don’t need a self-help mantra; we need to realize we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. God gave us love, He gave us life, and He gave us a lift! Our biggest *But God* moment is when He saved us from our sins by His grace and for His glory.

As Romans 6:4-5 says, baptism is a visual reminder of our burial and resurrection with Christ: *“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”* BTW, if you’re a born-again believer and you’ve not yet been baptized, our next baptism services will be held on February 24-25.

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3. God’s plan: To display His grace. Shortly after the Lord saved me, someone told me I was a *“trophy of God’s grace.”* I didn’t know what that meant but I knew it had something to do with God changing my life. I had never looked into the origin of this phrase until this week when I studied verse 7 and discovered that dead, depraved, and doomed people who have been brought to life through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, are put on display like trophies for the world to see: *“So that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

The phrase, *“so that”* means, *“for the purpose of.”* The word *“show”* means, *“to point out, to display.”* God brings dead sinners to life in order to display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness both now and in the ages to come on earth and in heaven. Romans 2:4 says: *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.”* God delights to show great grace to great sinners. If you’re saved, you are a trophy of God’s grace, and the church serves as a trophy case of sinners made alive by Christ.

4. God’s promise: To save us through faith. We come now to Ephesians 2:8-9, a passage God has used to save countless people over the centuries: *“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.”* Our salvation is not something we earn through performance or penance but is a free gift from God. This is emphatic in the Greek and literally reads like this: *“Of God, it is the gift.”*

We appropriate salvation by faith, not by works. We trust in the finished work of Jesus, not in our works. I'm reminded of what Jesus said in Luke 7:50: "***Your faith has saved you; go in peace.***" Romans 4:5 says: "***And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.***"

In order to be saved, we must first recognize we are sinners under the wrath of God. The battle cry of the Reformation was that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ for the glory of God. The "Five Solas" capture this well. I see four of them on display in Ephesians 2:8-9:

<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	In Scripture Alone
<i>Sola Gratia</i>	By Grace Alone – " <i>riches of His grace.</i> "
<i>Sola Fide</i>	Through Faith Alone – " <i>saved through faith.</i> "
<i>Solus Christus</i>	Because of Christ Alone – " <i>in Christ Jesus.</i> "
<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i>	For the Glory of God Alone – " <i>He might show.</i> "

I turn to Ray again: "*God specializes in saving really bad people...grace also means that some people may be too good to be saved. That is, they may have such a high opinion of themselves that they think they don't need God's grace. They may admit they are sinners, but they don't admit they are spiritually dead...God's grace cannot help you until you are desperate enough to receive it.*"

Grace is the source, faith is the means, and salvation is the result. As Martin Luther said, our situation is so hopeless that salvation must come from "*another place.*" The Reformers referred to this as "*alien righteousness,*" meaning a righteousness that comes from outside of us.

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5. Our purpose: To do deeds of service. We are not saved *by* our works, but we are saved *for* good works. Works are the fruit of salvation, not the root of our salvation. We see this clearly in verse 10: "***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***" The word "***workmanship***" comes from the word which gives us "*poem*" and refers to an author's "*magnum opus,*" or his greatest achievement. In other words, a masterpiece. Michelangelo was once asked what he was doing as he was chipping away at a shapeless rock. I love his reply: "*I'm liberating an angel from this stone.*"

The word **“created”** means, *“to form or to shape, to make something out of nothing.”* When God saves a sinner, a new person is formed as we see in 2 Corinthians 5:17: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** We have been recreated for good works. I’m reminded of the boy who was acting up in his Sunday School class. The teacher said, *“Why do you act like that? Don’t you know who made you?”* The boy replied, *“God did, but He ain’t through with me yet!”*

Notice the purpose behind this. God does His work in us and for us so we will walk in the works He has prepared for us to do. If you are saved, God has called you to serve Him. It’s part of His plan and purpose for your life – He’s prepared you to do the works He has prepared for you to do. One author writes, *“Without a purpose, life is motion without meaning.”*

The good works God has for us were **“prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** This literally means, *“to make ready beforehand.”* God has not only prepared *us* for good works; He has prepared good works *for* us. The deeds that God wants us to do have been decreed beforehand. This means I don’t have to search hard for what God wants me to do today. My job is to simply walk in the works God has prepared for me to do and be responsive when these opportunities present themselves.

Early this past Tuesday morning, I drove out to Moody Radio to share my monthly devotional. As you may know, WDLM is one of our Go Team partners and our “On Mission” sermons are broadcast on the station at 11:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Sundays. The radio station is out in the middle of a cornfield between Coal Valley and Orion. The roads were icy, so I drove very slowly. On my way back, I noticed a car had run off the road, had somehow catapulted over a snowbank and landed in a field about thirty yards away. I could tell this had just happened because the lights were on and my first thought was that someone should help them. Then it hit me that someone was me.

I pulled over, put my flashers on and trudged through the deep snow, almost getting swallowed by the snowbank. As I came up to the car it was still running, and because it had tinted windows I couldn’t see inside. Before knocking on the window, I wished Chris, our “paramedic pastor” was with me because I don’t do well around blood. Not knowing what I would find, the passenger window lowered, and I saw three guys in the car and no blood. All the air bags had activated but they were fine, though shaken up. I decided to shake things up some

more by offering to pray for them. They all awkwardly bowed their heads while I said a prayer. When I learned real help was on the way, I trudged back through the snow and went on my way.

The truth that God has good work for me to do every day gives me great comfort because I don't have to search hard for what God wants me to do. I just need to walk in the ways that He's prepared for me. It's not up to us to figure out what we should do *for* God. God has already taken care of that. It's up to us to find out what God *has* for us to do. Sometimes I wonder how many times I have missed the good works that God has prepared for me due to my selfishness or busyness or sinfulness.

Edgewood is full of servants who have discovered the joy of walking in the good works God has prepared for them to do. I think of how Nan Norcross and Patty Steele have been discipling our first and second grade girls. About a year ago, I visited their class to thank the girls for making cards of encouragement for me. What a delight to observe Nan and Patty communicate the grace and glory of the gospel to these young image bearers! Nan has been teaching for 62 years and Patty for 56. Combined, they have been serving in children's ministry for 118 years!

After more than six decades teaching God's Word, due to health issues, Nan is transitioning to a ministry of prayer for Edgewood. She has committed to pray for one hour every Sunday from 9-10 a.m.

When I asked if I could call her up front today, she politely declined, saying what she does is all for God's glory. She did give me permission to put up her picture (Patty did as well) in the hopes this will motivate and mobilize others to serve. I wrote down a few highlights of our conversation this week.

- Nan has been teaching the girls about the Holy Spirit. In her preparation, she has done a lot of reading from A.W. Tozer and Charles Spurgeon. She said, *"There's no truth too hard for them to learn...they just need it taught at their level."*
- She prays regularly for each girl by name and will continue to do so, knowing God has plans and purposes for each one. As an example, she talked about teaching Kim Contreras (Taylor) many years ago. Kim now serves as one of our Go Team partners in Fresno, CA.
- At the end of each year, she does a "Blessing Ceremony," where she gives a personalized blessing for each girl and prays specifically for them by name.

- When I asked her what she's learned about serving, she said the issue is not really our *ability*, but our *dependability*. She emphasized the importance of just showing up, of being present so God can use us.
- As she reflected on her time teaching, she remarked, "*I had more joy than I could have ever imagined.*"

Here's a question. Has God prepared you for some prepared work in our children's ministry? We're grateful that Polly Smith has stepped up to teach the first and second grade girls (I don't know if she's aware this is a 62-year commitment). Because God is bringing more young families to EBC, we have significant needs in nursery and preschool. We are looking for servants willing to serve once a month. Make a note on your connection card if you'd like to learn more.

Speaking of children's ministry, we're still searching for our next Children's Director, and are so grateful that Sheila is continuing in her role until God brings someone to us. We're holding on to this truth in our search...*but God!* We were scheduled to have a meeting with Vanderbloemen, our search partner, on Thursday but it was cancelled because our consultant was not able to fly to Moline due to the fog. He has told us they have identified three candidates for our Administrative Pastor position and will be presenting them to our leadership team soon.

Accepting Your Assignment

If you are a born-again believer, you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Be on the lookout every day for what He has in store for you.

- 1. Make sure what you're doing comes out of your being.** When we're growing in grace, then we can give out in grace, not because we have to, but because we want to. Working for God should be an honor, not a bother. When the famed English architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was directing the building of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, some of the workers were interviewed by a journalist who asked them: "*What are you doing here?*" The first worker said, "*I'm cutting stone for three shillings a day.*" The second laborer replied, "*I'm putting in ten hours a day on this stinkin' job.*" The third guy replied, "*I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build the greatest cathedral in Great Britain for the glory of God.*"

2. **Small is often better than big.** When God prepares a work for you to walk in, it might appear small to you, but it is never too small to the Savior. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 10:42: *“And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”*

3. **Pray so you know what God has prepared for you.** Ask God every day, *“What good works have you prepared for me to do? How can I join your ‘secret service’ team? Help me to see what you have for me and to do it.”* Incidentally, many “interruptions” are actually hidden opportunities God has prepared for us.

4. **Walk across the room.** A walk consists of two simple steps, repeated over and over again. William Penn wrote: *“I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore there be any kindness I can show or any good thing I can do to any fellow-being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”* Take a deep breath this week and simply walk over to someone who is hurting or lonely. You could start today, right after the service ends. Instead of talking to someone you already know, go up to someone you don’t know and begin a conversation.

5. **Do the next right thing.** Sometimes we get overwhelmed because it seems so complicated and difficult. Here’s a thought. When you see a need, simply meet the need if you can. As our students learned at their fall retreat, *“Just Do Something!”*

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Let’s summarize what we’ve learned today. Actually, we can’t say we’ve learned it until we put it into practice.

1. **Our plight: We were dead in sin.**
2. **God’s provision: He makes us alive with Christ.**
3. **God’s plan: To display His grace.**
4. **God’s promise: To save us through faith.**
5. **Our purpose: To do deeds of service.**

Your salvation has already been purchased and you can’t try to pay for it yourself. You can’t perform enough to achieve it, and you can’t do enough penance to earn it because it’s a free gift of grace. But it’s not automatic. You must appropriate it

by repenting of your sins and receiving the Savior, who died in your place and rose on the third day.

I love the lyrics to the song, “Grace.”

*Your grace leads the sinner home,
From death to life forever.
Your grace that reaches far and wide to every tribe and nation,
Has called my heart to enter in the joy of your salvation.*

Are you ready to make today your day of salvation? If so, pray this prayer with me.

Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept You out of my life. I confess that I am a dead sinner headed for an outpouring of your righteous wrath. I repent of my sins and by faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. Thank you for Your love, for Your grace, and for Your mercy. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe and now I receive, so that I can be born again and become Your child. Help me do the works you've prepared for me and to give You the glory You deserve. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

New Member: Louise Dolvig (10:45)