

Ephesians - Fullness: From Death to Life

Dr. John Carmichael

[Eph 2:1-10 NASB95] 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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 ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not as 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 so that we would walk in them.

- There are some problems that can be solved through improvement.
- If you are weak, you can become stronger. If you are ignorant, you can learn. If you are inexperienced, you can grow. If you are lost, someone can give you directions.
- But what do you do when you are dead? You cannot educate, motivate, discipline or rehabilitate a dead person into life. A dead person does not need improvement. A dead person needs resurrection.
- That is precisely where Paul begins Ephesians 2. Paul does not say humanity is merely confused, wounded, dysfunctional, undereducated, or spiritually weak. He says we were dead.
- The commentary material emphasizes that the Greek construction begins with the condition, “you being dead,” and does not reach the great action of the sentence until verses 4–5: “But God... made us alive together with Christ.”
- That is the gospel in two movements: “You were dead...” “But God...”
- The Life in the Spirit New Testament Commentary describes five dimensions of humanity's condition apart from Christ: spiritual death, conformity to the world, bondage under the ruler of the kingdom of the air, domination by the desires of the flesh, and exposure to divine wrath. Yet Paul deliberately places that desperate condition against God's mercy, love, grace, and kindness.
- This means salvation cannot simply be God helping us become better versions of ourselves. Salvation is resurrection. It is God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves.
- And that makes Ephesians 2:1–10 one of the greatest descriptions of salvation Paul ever wrote.

What happens when the grace of God encounters a person who is spiritually dead?

Paul shows us that the miracle of grace reveals the death we could not escape, gives the life we could not produce, establishes the position we could not earn, and creates the life we were always meant to live.

I. GRACE REVEALS THE DEATH WE COULD NOT ESCAPE

- a. **[Eph 2:1-3 NASB95] 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.**

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- b. Before Paul tells us how wonderful salvation is, he tells us how desperate our condition was. We will never appreciate the miracle of grace until we understand the catastrophe of sin.
 - i. We were spiritually dead.
 - 1. Paul says they were dead “in trespasses and sins.”
 - 2. The commentary material distinguishes the terms: paraptōmata - trespasses: the idea of falling, stumbling, or crossing a boundary. Hamartiai - sins: missing the mark and living under sin's corrupting power.
 - 3. We are both rebels and failures. Spiritual death does not mean physical inactivity. A spiritually dead person can be intelligent, successful, moral, religious, creative, and productive.
 - 4. It means that apart from Christ, humanity is alienated from the life of God.
 - 5. [Col 2:13 NASB95] 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,
 - ii. We were influenced by the world.
 - 1. “in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world...” v. 2
 - 2. Before Christ, we simply followed the current. The world has a course - values, assumptions, desires, priorities, and behaviors flowing in a direction contrary to God.
 - 3. If Christ does not determine our direction, the surrounding culture will.
 - iii. We were under spiritual influence.
 - 1. “...according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”
 - 2. There is a distinctly Pentecostal dimension here that should not be overlooked.
 - 3. Paul's worldview is unapologetically supernatural. Behind the visible rebellion of humanity is an invisible kingdom of darkness.
 - 4. The commentary notes something striking: the language of Satan “working” in the disobedient comes from energeō - language of active energizing. Yet Ephesians has already spoken about God's mighty power operating toward believers in 1:19–20.
 - 5. There are competing spiritual influences. But Satan is a prince, not the King. His authority is limited.
 - 6. Christ has already been exalted “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21).
 - iv. We were dominated by the flesh.
 - 1. “...indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind...” - v. 3
 - 2. Notice Paul's three enemies: The world around us. The devil against us. The flesh within us.
 - 3. Humanity's problem cannot be blamed entirely on Satan.
 - 4. We participated willingly in our rebellion.
 - v. We were children of wrath.
 - 1. This is the darkest statement of the passage.
 - 2. Sin is not merely destructive; it places humanity under God's righteous judgment.
 - 3. And notice Paul's language: “among them we too all formerly lived...” Paul moves from “you” to “we.”
 - 4. Everybody needs grace.

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- c. Application: Christianity makes no sense if humanity merely needs improvement. Why all this stuff? Because our fundamental problem was not ignorance. It was death. The gospel is not God's self-help program. The gospel is God's resurrection program.

II. GRACE GIVES THE LIFE WE COULD NEVER PRODUCE

- a. [Eph 2:4-5 NASB95] 4 **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
- b. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..."
- c. We were dead. But God. We followed the world. But God. We were under the influence of darkness. But God. We were dominated by the flesh. But God. We were children of wrath. But God.
- d. The turning point in your story was not "But I." It was "But God."
 - i. God acted because of who He is.
 - 1. Paul piles up four descriptions of God's character in verses 4–7: Mercy. Love. Grace. Kindness.
 - 2. The source material makes an important observation: the reasons for salvation are found in God Himself, not in something lovable or meritorious within us.
 - 3. God did not save us because we finally became worthy of saving. "...even when we were dead in our transgressions..."
 - 4. Grace came looking for us while we were still dead.
 - 5. [Rom 5:8 NASB95] 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 - ii. God made us alive with Christ.
 - 1. "...made us alive together with Christ..."
 - 2. This is resurrection language. The same divine power Paul celebrated in Ephesians 1—the power that raised Jesus from the dead—is now operating in us.
 - 3. Paul does not describe Christianity merely as turning over a new leaf. The dead person lives. This is regeneration. This is new birth. This is resurrection life.
 - 4. [Rom 8:11 NASB95] 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.
- e. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in the believer.
- f. Christianity is not merely believing something happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago.
- g. Through the Spirit, the resurrection life of Christ becomes a present reality within us.
- h. The commentary material describes salvation as deliverance from death, the world's ways, Satan's dominion, and God's wrath, while positively bringing us into the new life of Christ through the indwelling Spirit.
- i. Application: Some people still define themselves by what they were. "My addiction." "My failure." "My past." "My sin." "My family history." "My worst decision."
- j. But Paul's grammar is important: "You WERE dead." That was your condition. It does not have to remain your identity. Grace gives you permission to stop introducing yourself by your tombstone.
- k. If Christ has made you alive, you are not who you were.

III. GRACE RAISES US INTO A NEW POSITION

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- a. [Eph 2:6-7 NASB95] 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- b. The commentary points out that these correspond to the great events of Christ's victory: Resurrection. Ascension. Enthronement.
- c. Even more significantly, Paul attaches the Greek prefix syn—"together with"—to these actions. We have been: made alive WITH Christ, raised WITH Christ, seated WITH Christ. Our salvation is participation in Christ's victory through union with Him.
 - i. Resurrection changes our life. "made us alive together with Christ..."
 - ii. Ascension changes our position. "raised us up with Him..."
 - iii. Enthronement changes our authority. "...seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."
- d. [Col 3:1-3 NASB95] 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
 - i. This does not mean the spiritual battle is finished. Ephesians 6 will make that impossible.
 - ii. But it means we fight from Christ's victory rather than for Christ's victory.
 - iii. This is where Ephesians 2 connects directly with Ephesians 1. The resurrection power we prayed to see in Ephesians 1 is the resurrection power we are now called to live in Ephesians 2.
- e. Spirit-filled living is not trying to manufacture spiritual power. It is living from union with the victorious Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- f. You have changed kingdoms, identities, positions, spiritual environments. You came out of the grave and into resurrection life.
- g. Application: Stop living emotionally as though you are still buried in something Jesus already raised you out of. You may still experience temptation, fight spiritual battles, but those struggles no longer define your position.
- h. Your struggle may describe today's battle, but Christ defines your identity.

IV. GRACE GIVES US A SALVATION WE COULD NEVER EARN

- a. [Eph 2:8-9 NASB95] 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- b. Here Paul gives us three foundational gospel words: Saved. Grace. Faith.
- c. The commentary material makes an important exegetical point concerning: "...and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..."
- d. Grammatically, "that" (touto) is neuter while "faith" (pistis) is feminine. Therefore Paul's immediate point is not narrowly that "faith" alone is the gift, but that the entire reality of salvation by grace through faith is God's gift.
- e. That matters. We contribute no grounds for boasting.
- f. Religion says: "Look what I did for God." Grace says: "Look what God did for me."
- g. [Tit 3:5 NASB95] 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,
- h. The Pentecostal life must always remain a grace life. We do not earn God's acceptance through: praying longer, fasting harder, giving more, shouting louder, serving more faithfully, or even operating in spiritual gifts.
- i. Those things can become beautiful responses to grace. They can never become substitutes for grace.

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- j. Application: Ask yourself: Am I obeying God because I am trying to earn His acceptance, or because in Christ I have already received His grace? Grace destroys both pride and despair. Pride says: "I deserve this." Despair says: "I could never deserve this." Grace answers both: "You don't deserve it. It is a gift."

V. GRACE CREATES SOMETHING NEW

- a. [Eph 2:10 NASB95] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- b. Paul now moves from resurrection imagery to creation imagery.
- c. God does not merely revive. God recreates.
- d. The word translated "workmanship" is poiēma. The commentary describes it as God's workmanship, handiwork, work of art, or masterpiece. The word appears elsewhere in Romans 1:20 concerning what God has made in creation. That means Paul is deliberately using creation language.
- e. [2Co 5:17 NASB95] 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, [he is] a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
- f. This is not behavior modification. This is new creation. God is not merely polishing the old you. He is creating something new in Christ.
- g. The commentary summarizes it powerfully: "Salvation is creation, recreation, new creation."
- h. Think about the two great miracles described in this passage:
 - i. Resurrection — God brings life from death.
 - ii. Creation — God brings something into existence that did not exist before.
- i. Neither can be accomplished through human effort.
- j. Only God can raise the dead. Only God can create.
- k. Therefore salvation must be grace.
- l. Application: Maybe you look at your life and see damaged pieces. God sees His workmanship. God sees what His grace is creating. Heaven calls you His workmanship. You are not God's discarded project. You are God's ongoing work of grace.

VI. GRACE EMPOWERS THE LIFE WE WERE CREATED TO LIVE

- a. [Eph 2:10 NASB95] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- b. Here Paul gives us the proper relationship between grace and works. We are not saved BY good works. But we are absolutely saved FOR good works.
- c. Good works are not the root of salvation. They are the fruit of salvation.
- d. They are not the cause of grace. They are the consequence of grace.
- e. God does not simply command good works and then leave us powerless to perform them. Grace empowers what grace commands.
- f. The Holy Spirit gives us both desire and ability to live differently.
- g. The Fire Bible notes emphasize that continuing grace enables believers to live for Christ, resist sin, and serve God's purposes. God's grace works within believers, giving both the desire and power to accomplish His purposes.
- h. That means grace is not merely pardon for yesterday. Grace is power for today.
- i. Don't do good works trying to get saved. Do good works because you have been saved.
- j. And don't try to accomplish God's work merely through human strength. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to walk in what God has already prepared.

- **Grace does not merely forgive the guilty; grace raises the dead, creates something new, and empowers the redeemed to live the life God prepared for them.**

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- **Declaration: Holy Spirit, give me the desire, the power, the opportunity, and the courage to do what the Father has prepared for me. We are not working FOR grace. We are working FROM grace. We are not trying to become alive. We ARE alive in Christ. And now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will walk in the life God prepared for us.**