

## New Series: Who Am I? Ephesians 2:1-10

**“Our old nature is no more extinct than the devil, but God’s will is that the dominion of both should be broken.” – John R. W. Stott**

**“The only thing that a man can contribute to his redemption is the sin from which he needs to be redeemed.” – William Temple**

**If there is to be in our celestial garment but one stitch of our own making we are all of us lost. – Charles Spurgeon**

- I. Today we begin chapter 2 of Ephesians. Paul immediately tells us that we were dead. What does he mean?

This means spiritually dead; that is, he is unable to understand and appreciate spiritual things. Just as a person physically dead does not respond to physical stimuli, so a person spiritually dead is unable to respond to spiritual things. His spiritual faculties are not functioning, and they cannot function until God gives him life. The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. – Warren Wiersbe

We should not hesitate to reaffirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living. The fact is, dead people can’t do anything, and that is what Paul is talking to us about – the spiritual state of those apart from Christ. – R. Kent Hughes

Man does not become spiritually dead because he sins; he is spiritually dead because by nature he is sinful. He is spiritually dead while being physically alive. Because he is dead to God, he is dead to spiritual life, truth, righteousness, inner peace and happiness, and ultimately to every other good thing. – John MacArthur

*Paraptoma* (trespasses) means to slip, fall, stumble, deviate, or go the wrong direction.

*Hamartia* (sins) originally carried the idea of missing the mark, as when hunting with a bow and arrow. It then came to represent missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. In the spiritual realm it refers to missing and falling short of God’s standard of holiness, and in the New Testament it is the most common and general term for sin (used 173 times).

*Transgressions* indicates wrong steps taken or a deliberate breaking of the law. To *sin* means “to miss the mark.” The sins he speaks of here are not mere isolated acts; they speak of a way of life or a pattern of conduct in which these people had walked. – Shepherd’s Notes

**John MacArthur quote from page 55.**

II. Paul then goes on to give several descriptions of our life before salvation in verses 1-3. What are they?

**World**

*Kosmos* (world) means the world order, the world's system of values and way of doing things – the world's course.

The word translated "world" (*kosmos*) is used 186 times in the Greek New Testament, and virtually every instance has an evil connotation. – R. Kent Hughes

Those without Christ are captive to the social and value system of the present evil age, which is hostile to Christ. They are willing slaves to the pop culture of the media, the "group-think" of the talk shows, post-Christian mores, and man-centered religious fads. The spiritually dead are dominated by the world! – R. Kent Hughes

The "world" does not mean the physical universe. It means the cosmos, society, civilization, life-pattern, or life-style of the world today. – J Vernon McGee

The unsaved person, either consciously or unconsciously, is controlled by the values and attitudes of this world. – Warren Wiersbe

The world system is ruled by three characteristics: humanism, materialism, and illicit sex. Humanism places man above everything else. Man is the measure and end of all things. Materialism places high value on physical things, especially money, because money is a means of acquiring all the other things. Sexual perversion dominates modern western society as it has no other societies since the lowest periods of ancient Greece and Rome. – John MacArthur

**Devil**

Because of his demonic associates and his power over the world system, Satan influences the lives of unbelievers, and also seeks to influence believers. He wants to make people "children of disobedience." He himself was disobedient to God, so he wants others to disobey Him too. – Warren Wiersbe

The Devil dominates and energizes the spiritually dead! – R. Kent Hughes

Not all unsaved people are necessarily indwelt at all times by Satan or are demon-possessed. But knowingly or unknowingly they are subject to Satan's influence. – John MacArthur

**Flesh**

1 John 2:15-17

James 4:1-4

*Epithumia* (lusts) refers to strong inclinations and desires of every sort, not simply to sexual lust.

*Thelema* (desires) emphasizes strong willfulness, wanting and seeking something with great diligence.

These two words are used synonymously to represent fallen man's complete orientation to his own selfish way. The flesh (*sarx*) refers to the dissipation of life that comes when one is abandoned to doing whatever feels good. The mind (*dianoia*) indicates the deliberate choices that defy the will of God .

The flesh refers to that fallen nature that we were born with, that wants to control the body and the mind and make us disobey God. – Warren Wiersbe

The world dominates from *without*, the flesh from *within*, and the Devil from *beyond*. These are the terrible dynamics of spiritual death! **It has also been noted that these three verse in Ephesians 2:1-3 are a three-verse summary of the first three chapters of Romans.** – R. Kent Hughes

You see there is something wrong with a life-style that includes everything in the world but leaves Christ out of it. – J. Vernon McGee

Will you weep when you leave this world because you are so wrapped up in it? Are you all wrapped up in a job or in a business, in a home or in some club, or in a worldly church? Would you be reluctant to go because everything will be changed? – J. Vernon McGee

III. There may be no better words than “But God” at the beginning of verse 4. How does God treat his children even though we were “dead”?

This is such a radical change from the first three verses, which are as black and hopeless as anything can be. – J. Vernon McGee

God is “rich in mercy” and “in grace” and these riches make it possible for sinners to be saved. In His mercy, He does not give us what we do deserve, and in His grace He gives us what we do not deserve. And all of this is made possible because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was at Calvary that God displayed His hatred for sin and His love for sinners. – Warren Wiersbe

God's mercy is *plousios*, rich, overabounding, without measure, unlimited. – John MacArthur

IV. In verses 5-7, Paul gives believers the results of His working in their lives. He gives three benefits of what God has done. R. Kent Hughes calls them *resurrection, ascension, and riches*.

As members of His body we are united to Him, so that we share His resurrection life and power. Our physical position may be on earth, but our spiritual position is “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” One sacrifice – the Lamb of God – has finished the great work of salvation. God did it all, and He did it by His grace. – Warren Wiersbe

Humanity is divided into two groups: those who are resurrected, and those who are dead. Though not yet there physically, we Christians are already in the heavenlies by virtue of our union with Christ. Spiritually, we are seated on the throne along with other believers. The powers of the spiritual realm have been brought to bear on our present life. He is going to show the all-surpassing riches of His grace to His children in the “limitless future, as age succeeds age.” He will show His grace and kindness before His return, at His return, after His return, and in all ages. – R. Kent Hughes

Above all else, a dead person needs to be made alive. Not only are we dead to sin and alive to righteousness through His resurrection in which we are raised, but we also enjoy His exaltation and share in His preeminent glory. – John MacArthur

So it is with the grace of God: he has as much grace as you want, and he has a great deal more than that. The Lord has as much grace as a whole universe will require, but he has vastly more. He overflows: all the demands that can ever be made on the grace of God will never impoverish Him, or even diminish His store of mercy; there will remain an incalculable precious mine of mercy as full as when He first began to bless the sons of men. – Charles Spurgeon

V. R. Kent Hughes describes verses 8-9 as “the gospel in a nutshell – the most cogent summary of the dynamics of salvation to be found in scripture.” How is one saved according to these verses?

These are the great verses that consummate this section on the believer’s past, present, and future. We were dead in trespasses and sin, God saved us by His grace, raising us now to heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and we will someday be in heaven displaying the grace of God. None of this depends on our own works or merit, “for by grace ye have been saved.” – J. Vernon McGee

Spurgeon says, “It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not thy hope in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not even thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument; it is Christ’s blood and merit.

Faith is not the gift, salvation is. – J. Vernon McGee

Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. – John MacArthur

**John MacArthur quote from page 61.**

Not by works, but by grace through faith. Grace is unmerited favor – the love of God going out toward the utterly undeserving. The fact is, as soon as there is a mixture of even the smallest percentage of works, grace is debased and perverted. No one will be saved except for God’s unmerited grace. Men and women must be meek enough to receive His grace, to admit they cannot save themselves or earn their own admittance into heaven. They must listen with all they have to Paul’s third point that salvation comes “through faith.” – R. Kent Hughes

Acts 16:31

John 1:12

Acts 13:39

Romans 4:5

Paul gives three themes in verse 8: grace, salvation, and faith. Grace is used to describe the utter generosity that God gives to sinners even though they do not deserve it. The grammatical tense for “saved” indicates something accomplished in the past that continues to have results in the present. Faith refers to a total openness to letting God give the benefits of salvation and to obeying the will of God. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean faith is something we do by our own ability. Rather, faith is our willingness to let God into our lives. It includes both trust and commitment. – Shepherd’s Notes

**Frog story from R. Kent Hughes on page 74 concerning “not by works.”**

VI. Verse 10 says that we are God’s “workmanship.” What does this word mean? Why were we created?

The Greek word is *poiema* from which we get our word *poem*. – J. Vernon McGee

The Greek literally means, “that which has been made – a work – a making,” and sometimes it is even translated as “poem.” F.F. Bruce writes, “his work of art, his masterpiece.” – R. Kent Hughes

“Workmanship” means “that which is made, a manufactured product.” In other words, our conversion is not the end; it is the beginning. We are a part of God’s “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and God continues to work in us to make us what He wants us to be. His purpose is to make us more like Christ (Romans 8:29). – Warren Wiersbe

We are a work of art God is in the process of designing. – Shepherd’s Notes

The ultimate workmanship of God is a human being who, despite being dead in transgressions and sins, has been made alive in Christ. His very existence is due to the work of Christ. But the masterwork here has undergone a second creation “in Christ.” Jonathan Edwards is quoted, “the spiritual life which is reached in the work of conversion, is a far greater and more glorious effect than mere being and life.” – R. Kent Hughes

We are not saved by good works, but saved unto good works. The famous theologian John Calvin wrote, "It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone." We are not saved by faith plus good works, but by a faith that works. We do not perform good works to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God. – Warren Wiersbe

Although they have no part in gaining salvation, good works have a great deal to do with living out salvation. No good works can produce salvation, but many good works are produced by salvation. Before we can do any good work for the Lord, He has to do His good work in us. – John MacArthur

Luther's Dictum – "Justification is by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone."

Each of us has an eternally-designed job description which includes the task, the ability, and the place to serve. And whatever task to which he has called you, you will be equipped for it as surely as a bird is capable of flight. And in doing the works he has called you to do, you will be both more and more his workmanship and more and more your true self. There is nothing more beautiful than his workmanship working for him. Are we doing this? – R. Kent Hughes

James 2  
Ephesians 4:22-24  
Colossians 3:1

**Questions from Warren Wiersbe on page 21.**

people standing on the bank of a wide river, perhaps a mile across. Each of them is trying to jump to the other side. The little children and old people can jump only a few feet. The larger children and agile adults can jump several times that far. A few athletes can jump several times farther still. But none of them gets near the other side. Their degrees of success vary only in relation to each other. In relation to achieving the goal they are equal failures.

Throughout history people have varied greatly in their levels of human goodness and wickedness. But in relation to achieving God's holiness they are equal failures. That is why the good, helpful, kind, considerate, self-giving person needs salvation as much as the multiple murderer on death row. The person who is a good parent, loving spouse, honest worker, and civic humanitarian needs Jesus Christ to save him from the eternal condemnation of hell as much as the skid row drunk or the heartless terrorist. They do not lead equally sinful lives, but they are equally in the state of sin, equally separated from God and from spiritual life.

Jesus said, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (Luke 6:33). On another occasion He said, "You then, being evil, [nevertheless] know how to give good gifts to your children" (Luke 11:13). A person apart from God can do humanly good things. But as the Lord points out in both of those statements, the person is still a sinner, still evil by nature, and still operating on a motive less than that of glorifying God. When Paul and the others were shipwrecked on the island of Malta, Luke reports that "the natives showed us extraordinary kindness" (Acts 28:2); yet those natives remained superstitious pagans (v. 6). A sinner's doing good is good, but it cannot change his nature or his basic sphere of existence, and it cannot reconcile him to God.

Relational goodness is helpful to other people and is more pleasing to God. It is a step in the right direction. But a hundred thousand such steps cannot bring a person any nearer to God. Because it is a sinner's condition of sinfulness and not his particular sins that separate him from God, his particular acts of goodness cannot reconcile him to God.

During Jesus' second farewell discourse to His disciples He said, "He [the Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin" (John 16:8). The sin of which He will convict men is the sin of disbelief in Jesus Christ (v. 9). That is the sin of separation, the sin that both causes and reflects man's alienation from God. It is the sin of not accepting God as God and Christ as Savior, the sin of rejection. It is not particular acts or statements of rejection but the sphere of rejection in which the unsaved person exists that separates him from God. That is his state of spiritual death, his being dead in . . . trespasses and sins.

In the state of spiritual death, the only walking, or living, a person can do is 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. *Kosmos* (world) does not here represent simply the physical creation but the world order, the world's system of values and way of doing things—the world's course. And as Paul makes clear, the course of this world follows the leadership and design of Satan, the prince of the power of the air.

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that, God would not want us to rely on them even if we had them. Otherwise salvation would be in part by our own works, and we would have some ground to boast in ourselves. Paul intends to emphasize that even faith is not from us apart from God's giving it.

Some have objected to this interpretation, saying that faith (*pistis*) is feminine, while that (*touto*) is neuter. That poses no problem, however, as long as it is understood that that does not refer precisely to the noun faith but to the act of believing. Further, this interpretation makes the best sense of the text, since if that refers to by grace you have been saved through faith (that is, to the whole statement), the adding of and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God would be redundant, because grace is defined as an unearned act of God. If salvation is of grace, it has to be an undeserved gift of God. Faith is presented as a gift from God in 2 Peter 1:1, Philippians 1:29, and Acts 3:16.

The story is told of a man who came eagerly but very late to a revival meeting and found the workmen tearing down the tent in which the meetings had been held. Frantic at missing the evangelist, he decided to ask one of the workers what he could do to be saved. The workman, who was a Christian, replied, "You can't do anything. It's too late." Horrified, the man said, "What do you mean? How can it be too late?" "The work has already been accomplished," he was told. "There is nothing you need to do but believe it."

Every person lives by faith. When we open a can of food or drink a glass of water we trust that it is not contaminated. When we go across a bridge we trust it to support us. When we put our money in the bank we trust it will be safe. Life is a constant series of acts of faith. No human being, no matter how skeptical and self-reliant, could live a day without exercising faith.

Church membership, baptism, confirmation, giving to charity, and being a good neighbor have no power to bring salvation. Nor does taking Communion, keeping the Ten Commandments, or living by the Sermon on the Mount. The only thing a person can do that will have any part in salvation is to exercise faith in what Jesus Christ has done for him.

When we accept the finished work of Christ on our behalf, we act by the faith supplied by God's grace. That is the supreme act of human faith, the act which, though it is ours, is primarily God's—His gift to us out of His grace. When a person chokes or drowns and stops breathing, there is nothing he can do. If he ever breathes again it will be because someone else starts him breathing. A person who is spiritually dead cannot even make a decision of faith unless God first breathes into him the breath of spiritual life. Faith is simply breathing the breath that God's grace supplies. Yet, the paradox is that we must exercise it and bear the responsibility if we do not (cf. John 5:40).

Obviously, if it is true that salvation is all by God's grace, it is therefore not as a result of works. Human effort has nothing to do with it (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). And thus, no one should boast, as if he had any part. All boasting is eliminated in salvation (cf. Rom. 3:27; 4:5; 1 Cor. 1:31). Nevertheless, good works have an important place, as Paul is quick to affirm.



## NOT BY WORKS

How is one saved? We answer first with Paul's negative affirmation in verse 9: "not by works, so that no one can boast." It is absolutely essential to understand and believe this if one is to be saved. *Salvation does not come by works!*

To accept the Bible's teaching that salvation is "not by works" means to go against the notions of our culture. I recall hearing an unbelieving preacher illustrate his philosophy by telling of a frog which fell into a large milk can. Try as it would, it could not get out. There was nothing to do but keep paddling, which it did until it churned a pad of butter and presto! saved itself by leaping from its self-made launching pad. Personally, if I fell into a pail of milk I would keep paddling as long as I could too, but I would not make that my philosophy of achieving eternal salvation. To think like that is to fall into the ancient Pelagian heresy which St. Augustine fought so passionately.

The sad truth is, the frog is an apt symbol of American folk religion. "Just keep on keeping on and you'll be all right" — "I'm a good person, not perfect, but there are a whole lot of people worse than I" — "God knows I'm not perfect, but I'm doing my best." That may be okay for Kermit the Frog, but it is not the language of salvation.

Our text gives us one reason salvation is not by works — "so that no one can boast." If salvation came by works, eternity would spawn a fraternity of rung-dropping, chest-thumping boasters — an endless line of celestial Pharisees: "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers" (Luke 18:11). In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, the goats on his left do all the boasting and are sent to judgment (Matthew 25:46; cf. 7:22). The sheep on his right (the saved, who go on to their heavenly reward) cannot even recall their good deeds (Matthew 25:37-39; cf. vv. 40-46), *for salvation does not come by works*. No one who is saved will have grounds to boast before God — or will even want to.

Important as this reason is, there are even deeper reasons why salvation is not by works — namely, the utter sinfulness of humanity contrasted with God's transcending standard of righteousness. God is radically righteous (Romans 1:17; 3:21). His righteousness of being is his standard, and no human can attain this because we are all radically sinful beings. The word *radical* comes from the Latin word *radix*, which means "root." The very root of our being, every part of our person, is tainted with sin. This is the foundation of the Apostle Paul's devastating litany of condemnation in Romans 3:10-18 where Paul employs the rabbinical technique of *charaz* (Hebrew for "string of pearls") in putting together an overwhelming list of evidences which prove the universally corrupt *character* (vv. 10-12) and *conduct* (vv. 13-18) of man. He concludes there that the entire human race

— Jews and Gentiles, from a radical inner core and can never approach matter how high we climb is "not by works."

Imagine that an thousand miles from a great Olympic swimmer swim at all. The Olympian this!" and takes off with America a thousand in thirty seconds the non-champion swimmer of sive fifty miles. Terrifying ten days if he doesn't

The truth is, despite do, no matter how "great flawed. We can try, but ranging the deck chair that is the truth.

Suppose I went person, but I don't believe the way some people believe Jesus is real. I simply *works*."

No one has that works is right at the door they have nothing with the Kingdom of Heaven

## BY GRACE

If we are not saved by the Bible is, by *grace*: "For and this not from you

What is *grace*? *toward the utterly ungodly* and the riches which are a gift. But the great and terrible gift. The idea of, "and you are people who have and experience is . . .

## Ephesians 2

of his ministry, Moses was depended on his own strength. Egyptian and had to flee Egypt, a foolish way to start a ministry. But forty years as a humble shepherd Moses experienced God's work—working that prepared him for years of magnificent service.

Other examples. Joseph suffered seven years before God put him in Egypt, second to Pharaoh. Anointed king when he was a child did not gain the throne until he had many years as an exile. Even though he spent three years in Arabia after his journey, no doubt experiencing God's work to prepare him for his ministry. God works in us before He can work and this leads to the fourth work.

### Work through Us (2:10b)

Worked in Christ Jesus unto good works, not saved by good works, but by God's grace through His mercy and good works. The famous theologian Martin Luther wrote, "It is faith alone that justifies; faith that justifies can never be added to it." We are not saved by faith plus good works, but by a faith that works. The basic theme is James 2, where the apostle says that saving faith always brings about a changed life. It is not enough to have faith; we must demonstrate our works.

Paul speaks of many different kinds of works. There are "the works of the law," which are "works of the flesh" (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). There are "works of the law" which are listed in Gal. 3:19-21. Paul spoke of "works of the law" (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11). The "dead works" (Eph. 5:11) seem to be "works that do not live," since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The "works of righteousness" (Eph. 5:11) refer to religious works, or deeds, that sinners try to practice for salvation. Isaiah declared that righteousnesses are as filthy rags in Isaiah 64:6. If our righteousnesses are as filthy rags at most our sins look like!

Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2:10 have two special characteristics: they are "good" works, in contrast to "works of darkness" and "wicked works." If we compare Ephesians 2:10 with Ephesians 2:8-9, we see that the unbeliever has Satan working in him, and therefore his works are

not good. But the believer has God working in him, and therefore his works are good. His works are not good because he himself is not good, but because he has a new nature from God, and because the Holy Spirit works in him and through him to produce these good works.

It is too bad that many believers minimize the place of good works in the Christian life. Because we are not saved by good works, they have the idea that good works are evil; and this is a mistake. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We do not perform good works to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God. Paul desired that Christ would be magnified in his body, even if it meant death (Phil. 1:20-21). We should "abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8), and be "fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10). One result of a knowledge of the Bible is that the believer is "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17 NASB). As believers, we are to be "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Our good works are actually "spiritual sacrifices" that we offer to God (Heb. 13:16).

It is important to note that we do not manufacture these good works. They are the results of the work of God in our hearts. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). The secret of Paul's good works was "the grace of God" (1 Cor. 15:10). Our good works are evidence that we have been born again. "Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Our good works are also testimonies to the lost (1 Peter 2:12). They win us the right to be heard.

A pastor friend told about a Christian lady who often visited a retirement home near her house. One day she noticed a lonely man sitting, staring at his dinner tray. In a kindly manner she asked, "Is something wrong?"

"Is something wrong?" replied the man in a heavy accent. "Yes, something is wrong! I am a Jew, and I cannot eat this food!"

"What would you like to have?" she asked.

"I would like a bowl of hot soup!"

She went home and prepared the soup and, after getting permission from the office, took it to the man. In succeeding weeks, she often visited him and brought him the kind of food he enjoyed, and eventually she led him to faith

in Christ. Yes, preparing soup can be a spiritual sacrifice, a good work to the glory of God.

But these works are not only good; they are also "prepared." "Good works which God hath before ordained [prepared] that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is in Romans 9:23: "vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." The unbeliever walks "according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2), but the believer walks in the good works God has prepared for him.

This is an amazing statement. It means that God has a plan for our lives and that we should walk in His will and fulfill His plan. Paul is not talking about "kismet"—an impersonal fate that controls your life no matter what you may do. He is talking about the gracious plan of a loving heavenly Father, who wills the very best for us. The will of God comes from the heart of God. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). We discover God's exciting will for our lives as the Spirit reveals it to us from the Word (1 Cor. 2:9-13).

It would be helpful to close this chapter with a personal inventory. Which of these four works are you experiencing? Is sin working against you because you have not yet trusted Christ? Then trust Him now! Have you experienced His work for you—in you—through you?

Are you wearing the "graveclothes" or the "grace-clothes"? Are you enjoying the liberty you have in Christ, or are you still bound by the habits of the old life in the graveyard of sin? As a Christian, you have been raised and seated on the throne. Practice your position in Christ! He has worked for you; now let Him work in you and through you, that He might give you an exciting, creative life to the glory of God.