Resurrected

God provides salvation by grace through faith apart from our good works.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

MEMORY VERSES: EPHESIANS 2:8-9

READ Ephesians 2:1-10, First Thoughts (p. 34), and Understand the Context (p. 34). As you read Ephesians 2:1-10, notice the contrast of life before salvation and after salvation. Consider what these contrasts reveal about the nature of salvation found through faith in Jesus.

STUDY Ephesians 2:1-10, using Explore the Text (pp. 35–39). Pay close attention to the words and phrases Paul used to describe God’s character, contrasted with how he described our character. For further insight, consult the Explore the Bible Commentary, found in both print and digital formats at LifeWay.com.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 40–41) and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Add variety to your plans for your group in this session by using at least one idea from More Ideas (p. 42). Consider new ways to implement the Suggested Music Idea (p. 42).

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Ephesians); □ PACK ITEM 4 (Poster: Ephesians 2: Old and New); and □ PACK ITEM 6 (Key Verses: Ephesians 2:8-9). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
KEY DOCTRINE

**Man**
Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God and fell from his original innocence, whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin (Rom. 3:23).

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FIRST THOUGHTS

A case can be made that virtually every advertisement and marketing message comes to us in a form of the “before and after” approach. At the very least it can be said that most cosmetic and fitness ads use this approach in which they show a person prior to using the product and then again with the amazing after effects. A subtle variation on this method is the “shock and awe” model, where shocking information is presented and followed up with an amazing solution to the problem.

(In PSG, p. 28) **How does a positive change in a person’s life motivate others to make that same change?**

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UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

**EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

In these verses, Paul painted a stark contrast between what human beings are in their essential nature and what they can become through the grace of God. What we find is a biblical “before and after” picture. Verses 1-3 portray the before picture; verses 4-10 portray the after picture.

A look at the cultural and religious context of Ephesus gives us a clearer view of the contrast between the before and the after. Worship in Ephesus centered around the cult of Diana, the Roman version of the Greek goddess named Artemis. She was the goddess who watched over nature and served as the patron deity of wild animals. She was portrayed as a woman with many breasts, depicting her fertility and nurturing qualities. The temple of Diana was located outside of the city walls of Ephesus in a sacred area dedicated to this cult. This temple was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. It was one of the seven wonders of the world, causing many to associate the city of Ephesus with Diana. Worshipers regularly processed into the temple with its statues of the goddess and participated in ceremonies led by priests who were eunuchs and priestesses who were virgins. An annual festival hosted many people from the region in a celebration of worship that included music, dancing, and drama. Also, the temple served as a banking center for the city, and an image of Diana appeared on their coinage. The Ephesians worshiped the god in order to secure her protection and care. Paul’s gospel of grace must have sounded so foreign to those involved in temple worship of Diana.

In addition to the cult of Diana, many people in the region were involved in magic and folk beliefs unique to their region. The story is told in Acts 19:13-20 of Paul doing extraordinary miracles there, including healing the sick and driving out evil spirits. A group of Jewish people following the
high priest Sceva attempted an exorcism but were unsuccessful. When the Ephesians heard the story, many of them came “confessing and disclosing their practices” (Acts 19:18). These practices included magic, as evidenced by the fact that they burned their books equaling the cost of 50,000 pieces of silver (Acts 19:19). Again, the religion of the Ephesians was about human works that would commend them to their gods. The gospel would have looked remarkably different than the magic and folk religions of their day.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ONCE DEAD (EPH. 2:1-3)

VERSES 1-2

Christianity is not a fixer-upper religion but a new construction. After Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesians (Eph. 1:15-23), he explained the work of Christ in creating the church. Before people come to Christ, they are dead in … trespasses and sins. This does not refer to physical death but spiritual deadness. The word trespasses means the willful crossing of a boundary. The word translated sins is the more general word for sin, meaning “to miss the mark.” We were both rebels and failures, and that left us spiritually dead, unable to relate to God.

Paul said in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Dead people cannot raise themselves. They need God, the One who has proven He can resurrect the dead. Any attempts by the spiritually dead to make themselves look better, act better, or relate to God better will only end in despair because the need is resurrection, not improvement.

How does spiritual deadness rule out the possibility of salvation by works?

The world says to believe in yourself or pick yourself up by your bootstraps. The Bible says you are dead in your trespasses and sins. Dead people cannot save themselves

Having declared that those outside of a relationship with Jesus are dead, Paul explained what that condition means. First, he said they lived according to the ways of this world. Though the word used for world does not always carry negative connotations, in this case it does. The ways of this world would include the non-Christian value system that those outside of Christ embrace. The Greek term used for lived means “to walk.” It describes a consistent way of life. Here it means to embrace the values of the world...
outside of Christ. The message of the world is the opposite of the message of Christ. The world says to believe in yourself or pick yourself up by your bootstraps. The Bible says you are dead in your trespasses and sins. Dead people cannot save themselves.

Describing the ways of the world, Paul explained this was according to the ruler of the power of the air. John described Satan as the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Satan was also referred to as the ruler of the demons (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). Paul used the term air to mean the abode of the demons. In Jewish cosmology, demons lived in the atmosphere surrounding the earth. They certainly had no place in heaven, but they could dwell in the area surrounding the earth. Satan and his demonic forces were now working in the disobedient. This was a reference to those outside of faith in Christ. John characterized people as either children of God or children of the devil (1 John 3:10). He also called those outside the faith as having the devil for their father (John 8:44).

Why is it inevitable that those outside of faith in Christ will embrace the world’s system?

VERSE 3

3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.
NOW ALIVE (EPH. 2:4-7)

VERSES 4-5
In verses 1-3, Paul described those outside the faith as lifeless, hopeless, and under condemnation. With one conjunction, but, the situation is reversed. Humanity outside of faith in Christ may be under God’s wrath, but God’s mercy restrains His wrath. Paul described God’s mercy as rich. This is a reminder of Psalm 103:8, which states, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.” Why would God display such mercy toward such great sinners? It was because of his great love. God’s mercy flows from His love.

In the previous section, Paul revealed that people were dead in their sins and under the wrath of God. A righteous God would be required to punish sin rather than overlook it. However, in His love, God provided a way that sin could be punished but the sinner go free. Paul wrote in another letter, “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Instead of punishing us for our sin, God poured His wrath upon His own Son, who deserved none of the punishment. Indeed, this is why Paul called God’s love great.

Because of His great love, God took three incredible actions toward those who have put their faith in Him. First, God made us alive with Christ. With the same certainty that God raised Jesus from the dead after the cross, He raises us from spiritual death and saves us by grace. The word grace is used twelve times in Ephesians. Those who have been raised from spiritual death to life cannot take credit for that miracle but can only marvel at the power of God to do the seemingly impossible. The word grace in verse 5 is a perfect tense verb, meaning it is action that started in the past but has continuing results in the present and future. Literally it could read, You have been saved by grace. We were saved by grace in the past, and we continue to be saved by grace in the present. Christians are now alive because of what God has done for them and what He continues to do in them.

How does the image of new birth encourage humility in a believer?

VERSE 6
A second action that God took on behalf of believers was He raised us up with him. This is a compound verb that begins with a prefix meaning “together with.” It is the word from which we get our English word sync. In sync with Jesus, we have been made alive and raised. This is a reference to the ascension of Jesus. In the same way that Jesus ascended to be with His Father, we have been raised with Him spiritually.

Why did God raise us? He seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus. Paul previously mentioned that God had blessed Christians with every spiritual blessing in the heavens (Eph. 1:3). So here he emphasized...
again that the believer has been raised to sit enthroned with Christ in the heavens. As believers identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus, they are seated in His authority. Paul stated in 2 Timothy 2:11, “This saying is trustworthy: For if we died with him, we will also live with him.” This is not speaking of a resurrection of our bodies, which is still in the future. Rather, this is a present participation with Christ in His resurrection. As God vindicated Christ in His resurrection, He vindicates us from our sin based on our identification with Christ.

VERSE 7
Why would God be so gracious to sinners? This verse gives the reason. He desires to display the immeasurable riches of his grace. God’s grace is magnified every time a sinner is saved. If the sinner could save himself, it would magnify the sinner’s qualities. But since the sinner is dead in sin, only God can raise him. This is done to show his kindness to us. This kindness is not indiscriminately applied to every person, but only those in Christ Jesus. God’s saving grace will not cover those who refuse to believe in Jesus.

God’s work in saving the believer demonstrates His grace in the coming ages. Those whom God has brought to life, raised, and seated in the heavens are living trophies of His grace now, but they will forever be testimonies of His grace and kindness.

THROUGH GRACE ALONE (EPH. 2:8-10)

VERSES 8-9
To this point, Paul has explained that the Ephesians were dead in their sin but made alive by the grace of God according to His mercy. How did something this marvelous happen? It is an act of God’s grace received by faith. For you are saved by grace. Salvation involves more than forgiveness of sins. It is deliverance from death, slavery, and wrath (vv. 1-3). Paul obliterated any illusions that we can save ourselves from such powerful forces, thus the necessity of God’s grace.

Believing that salvation is achieved by human means is thinking too highly of oneself and too lowly of the power of sin and death.

While the sole basis of salvation is God’s grace, Paul clarified that it is received through faith. In other letters, Paul emphasized the individual’s responsibility of receiving this salvation. (See Rom. 3:22,25; Gal. 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:5.) However, salvation by faith is God’s gift. Believing that salvation is achieved by human means is thinking too highly of oneself and too lowly of the power of sin and death. Salvation is the gift that God gave. God is the One who works in us unto salvation, but we have a responsibility to receive by faith what He offers.
Why do you think Paul emphasized so strongly that salvation was a gift of God rather than a work of humanity?

In order to exclude any thought that salvation is a human work, Paul added: \textit{not from works, so that no one can boast}. One cannot achieve salvation by doing good works or by keeping the law. In Romans, Paul declared that a person is justified by faith apart from keeping the law (Rom. 3:28). He added that Abraham was justified by faith and not works, and that was before the law was even given (Rom. 4:1-4). Paul reminded Titus that God saves us not by our works of righteousness but by the power of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (Titus 3:5). Paul is consistently clear that a person cannot earn salvation by being good or doing good. This excludes all boasting on the part of those who are saved. The one who is worthy of praise in the salvation event is God.

\textbf{VERSE 10}

Knowing that salvation is a work of God, Paul declared that Christians are \textit{his workmanship}. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word translated \textit{workmanship} is used of God’s material creation (Ps. 92:4; Eccl. 3:11). It could also be used to describe a pot created by a potter or a poem written by an author. This has led some translators to use the terms “masterpiece,” “handiwork,” or “work of art.” In the beginning, humanity was the work of God. After sin soiled that creation, God worked a new creation in the lives of those who trust in Him by faith.

\textbf{Good works are the fruit of salvation, not the root of it.}

Though salvation is not achieved by good works, it does produce good works after salvation is received. Again using the language of creation, Paul declared that Christians were \textit{created in Christ Jesus for good works}. Good works are the fruit of salvation, not the root of it. Paul consistently denied that human works contributed to salvation. He also consistently affirmed that those who were saved would manifest good works. (See 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:10; 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7,14.)

Finally, Paul described these good works as those \textit{which God prepared ahead of time for us to do}. This likely describes not specific individual works but a pattern of life for all those who have been saved and delivered by God’s salvation. The past, present, and future aspects of salvation all come together in this passage. In times past God provided a Savior, in the present we receive Him by faith, and in the future God will completely deliver us from the power of sin.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: On a board or large sheet of paper, make two columns, headed Before and After. Direct the group to think about things that emphasize before and after transformations (examples: a home improvement show, a diet plan, an advertising claim, or a personal hobby). Invite volunteers to call out words or phrases that describe the state of the before item prior to its restoration and after the metamorphosis. Ask: Why are advertising campaigns based on before and after photos and testimonies so effective?

GUIDE: Using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Ephesians), point out that today’s discussion from Ephesians will show the contrast of life before Christ with life after Christ.

INTRODUCE: We often talk about life-or-death situations when we’re trying to communicate the urgency of taking action. In Ephesians 2, Paul discussed salvation in life-or-death terms. His description of the before state of humanity, while grim, is necessary because it helps us appreciate the result of having Christ in our lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:1-3 and the others to listen for descriptions of the spiritually dead. Invite the group to call out descriptions as you list them on the board.

EXPLAIN: Spiritual deadness doesn’t mean a lack of activity. Instead, those who are spiritually dead are very active, but in sinful and destructive ways. Those without Christ remain under the strongholds of the sinful nature—defying God and exalting self.

ASK: How does Paul’s description of life without Jesus serve as motivation to share Jesus with others? (PSG, p. 32)

TRANSITION: The change Jesus makes when He comes into someone’s life isn’t a change from bad to good; it’s a change from dead to alive.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 2:4-7. Direct the group to listen for what many people think are the two most important words of the gospel.

DISCUSS: Whenever there is a before-and-after moment, someone makes a conscious decision to change something. A homeowner decides to renovate. An overweight person decides to exercise. In these verses, who makes the decision to initiate a change? God initiates change in our lives when we receive Him. That’s why two of the most important words are “But God.”

DISCUSS: What’s the difference between mercy and grace? According to verse 6, what was God’s motivation for making us alive? According to verse 7, what is His desired result?

MINI-LECTURE: Present a mini lecture on Paul’s background, based on Philippians 3:4-14. Emphasize that Paul didn’t describe his former way of life as evil or wicked, but as loss or rubbish because it was done apart from Christ. This would also be a great opportunity to share your own before-and-after testimony.
**DISCUSS:** Invite the group to share a time they may have gotten an invitation somewhere because of someone they knew or someone they were with. Direct someone to identify the verses using the word “with” in Ephesians 2:5-6. Ask: How significant is it that we’re in relationship with Christ? How does the changed life of a believer serve as a display of God’s grace and character? (PSG, p. 33)

**TRANSITION:** So far, Paul has focused on the “what” of salvation—we were dead but are now alive. Paul turned his attention to “how.” How does this transformation happen?

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 2:8-10. Point out that verses 8-9 are this week’s memory verses, and distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** *(Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark)* to anyone who doesn’t have one yet. Point out **Pack Item 6** *(Key Verses: Ephesians 2:8-9)*. Point out that verse 9 clarifies that we’re not saved by good works, while verse 10 emphasizes that we’re saved for good works. Ask: **What’s the difference?**

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** *(Poster: Ephesians 2: Old and New)*. Using the poster, lead group members to discuss the difference between the Old Life and the New Life. Call for group members to identify additional contrasts we can draw from verses 8-10. List those on the poster or a board.

**SUMMARIZE:** Review the paragraph under Verses 8-9 on page 34 of the PSG. Ask: **Why is pride so antithetical to the gospel?**

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to find partners (two people may comprise a team). Lead the partners to take turns explaining their answer to this question: What would you say to someone who was convinced they had to work to earn God’s approval or salvation? Reassemble the group. Allow volunteers to share insights gained.

**ASK:** How do our reasons for doing good things relate to our understanding of salvation? What do our motives reveal about our beliefs about salvation? (PSG, p. 35) How has your understanding of faith and good works changed as a result of this study?

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**REVIEW:** Call on volunteers to read the bulleted statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 36) to present a summary of the study. Then invite others to respond to this question: How can we develop a greater sense of urgency and more frequently share our faith?

**CHALLENGE:** Direct the group to turn to the inside front cover of their copy of the Personal Study Guide and silently read the plan of salvation, while you play some background music. (See the Suggested Music Idea on p. 42.) Tell the group that you will be contacting them this week by text or email, and that if they are unsure of their own salvation, you would be honored to talk with them about it. If they are confident of their salvation, direct them to pray for a friend, family member, or coworker who is not a believer.
PRACTICE

• Work on the memory verse for this session (Eph. 2:8-9). Search the Internet for art to go along with this verse that you can text to group members throughout the week.
• Commit to contacting each member of your group this week, emphasizing your willingness to talk with them if they have any questions or concerns about their salvation. Keep your schedule as clear as possible to make room for any opportunities for conversation.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
To replace the Focus Attention activity, lead the group to discuss the differences between a trophy you get for winning, an award you get for service, and a grant you get for need. Explain that when someone wins a competition, we often admire the recipient for their talent or determination. But when someone is the recipient of a gift, grant, or scholarship, we admire the generosity of the giver.

EXPLORE THE TEXT
• To supplement the discussion of Ephesians 2:1-3, lead the group to consider the difference between a testimony involving a radical change (such as someone getting saved out of a life of crime or addiction) and a testimony from someone who recognized his or her need for Christ early in life. Make the point that in both cases, the person was spiritually dead. Suggest that while it may seem that the first is more dramatic, the second may actually be a bigger miracle, since it can be hard to convince someone who is “good” or “moral” that they are in need of a Savior.
• To aid in memorizing Ephesians 2:8-10, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill on page 35 of the PSG.
• To enhance understanding of Ephesians 2:10, enlist testimonies from people who are involved in a ministry for which they feel they were uniquely gifted.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Guide the group to complete the second question set under In My Context on page 36 of the PSG: As a group, discuss how your Bible study group carries out its purpose based on new life in Christ. What is the purpose of your group and how does that purpose reflect insights found in Ephesians 2? Record insights.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
As group members are reading the plan of salvation, play the song “Only Grace,” by Matthew West, or “Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone),” by Chris Tomlin. As the song concludes, pray your group will more deeply understand the meaning of grace this week.