

Human Depravity Conquered by the Grace of God

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Ephesian Studies

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Bible Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

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Well, let us turn back in our Bibles this morning to Ephesians chapter two and I want to look at the first 10 verses with you this morning and then we will cover the second part of the chapter, God willing, on Wednesday evening. And I want to look at the first 10 verses of this chapter under the title, "Human Depravity Overcome by the Grace of God."

As a general outline of the first 10 verses we have what we were by nature, verses one to three, contrasted with what we are now by grace. Or, if you like, in verses one to three, what we were left to ourselves and what we now are, verses four to 10, by God's intervention. Or, if you like, what we would have been for all eternity in verses one to three, but now what we will be in verses four to 10 for all eternity in heaven.

Human depravity overcome or overruled by the grace of God.

Now, note, first of all in verse one we read the words, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."¹

Now that phrase "hath he quickened" is not in the original, but it is mentioned in verse five. But it is in the context of the passage. But if you take those words, "hath he quickened" you would literally just have, "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins."

This is the word, the word "dead" here is the Greek word νεκρος (nek-ros') from which we get the phrase necromancy which is a big word which simply means consulting the dead. So the Greek word here νεκρος (nek-ros'), we were dead in trespasses and sins.

Now in the New Testament this word νεκρος (nek-ros') is always translated dead. One hundred and thirty-two times this word is used and it is always translated into the English word "dead."

"And you... who were dead in trespasses and sins."²

¹ Ephesians 2:1.

² Ibid.

Illustration that comes to mind because the phraseology he uses here is, he doesn't just say you were dead, but he says you were dead in something which, the illustration that comes to my mind is you might use the phrase, "You were dead in the water," you know, completely dead.

So Paul does not just say here you were dead, but he says you were dead in something. There was something that caused your death or something that emphasizes your death or illustrates your death. And this death is a death in trespasses and sins.

Now if somebody was dead in the water and it would be a much greater emphasis than if they were just dead on the floor. If you walk into a room and saw somebody dead on the floor without knowing how long they were there, you might try and start, you know, a bit of artificial respiration. But if you come to a pool and you saw somebody dead at the bottom of the pool or lake and there was no bubbles it would become obvious that they were beyond any help.

So here Paul emphasizes that we are not just dead, but we are dead in something, something that controls us, something that dominates us, something that emphasizes our death. Dead and trespasses and sins.

Now the word "dead" or the word "death" means to be separated. If you turn over to Ephesians four verse 18 for a moment to illustrate this point.

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."³

So this is what this spiritual death means. The understanding is darkened. There is an alienation from the life of God because or through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart.

And look at verse 19.

"Who being past feeling..."⁴

Like if you go through a corpse and you said to the corpse, "Dear corpse, I am going to stick a big knife into you now." You know, the corpse is going to jump over with fright and you can stick that knife into the corpse as much as you want and you will get no response. The corpse [?]. You know, the corpse won't do that.

And here what this verse is saying is that these people, lost by nature, who are alienated from the life of God were past [?]. Why? Because we have given ourselves by nature over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness.

³ Ephesians 4:18.

⁴ Ephesians 4:19.

So this idea of this spiritual death is to be totally alienated, totally separated from the life of God.

Let me just quote from Albert Barnes who is excellent on this verse. Listen to what Albert Barnes says on this phrase, “dead in trespasses and sins.”⁵

“It is affirmed here of those to whom Paul wrote at Ephesus that before they were converted they were dead in sins. There is not anywhere a more explicit proof of depravity than this and no stronger language can be used. They were dead in relation to that which they afterward became alive, i.e., to holiness. Of course, this does not mean that they were in all respects dead. It does not mean that they had no animal life or that they did not breathe and walk and act. Nor can it mean that they had no living intellect or mental powers which would not have been true. Nor does it settle any question as to their ability or power while in that state. It simply affirms the fact that in relation to real spiritual life they were in consequence of sin like a dead man in regard to the objects which are around him. A corpse is insensible. It sees not, hears not, feels not. The sound of music and the voice of friendship and of the [?] do not arouse it. The rose and the lily breathe forth their fragrance around it, but the corpse perceives it not. The world is busy and active around it, but it is unconscious of it all. It sees no beauty in the landscape, hears not the voice of the friend, looks not upon the glorious sun and stars and is unaffected by the running stream and the rolling ocean.

“So with the sinner in regard to the spiritual and eternal world. He sees no beauty in religion. He hears not the call of God. He is unaffected by the dying love of the Savior and he has no interest in eternal realities. In all these he feels no more concern and sees no more beauty than a dead man does in the world around him. Such is, in fact, the condition of a sinful world. There is, indeed, life and energy and motion. There are vast plans and projects and the world is intensely active, but in regard to God,” or religion as Barnes calls it, “all is dead. In regard to God or religion all is dead. The sinner sees no beauty there and no human power can arouse him to act for God any more than human power can rouse the sleeping dead or open the sightless eyeballs on the light of day. The same power is needed in the conversion of a sinner which is needed in raising the dead. And one and the other alike demonstrate the omnipotence of him who can do it.”

Let me quote from John Wesley on this verse. And I was pleasantly surprised. Now it is only a short quote, but it is worth reading. Wesley, as we know, was an Arminian, but listen to what Wesley says on this verse. He wasn't as bad as many are today. Listen to what Wesley says. “Not only disease....” This is a direct quote. “They are not only diseased, but dead, absolutely void of all spiritual life. And as incapable of quickening themselves as persons who are literally dead.”

Now what I find amazing is that Wesley could say that and deny the doctrine of election, but there you go so as we all do contradictions in our theology.

⁵ Ephesians 2:1.

Secondly, we notice in this verse we could not help ourselves. We were dead and we couldn't help ourselves. That is why he says, "You hath he quickened..."⁶ Or, as it says in verse five, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."⁷

And the apostle Paul here wants to show us a contrast. He says, "You were dead, hopeless, helpless, deep in the water, beyond help. But God, who is rich in mercy, has raised the dead."

Now could you imagine in hospital if somebody went into cardiac arrest the doctor sitting back and saying, "Well, I wonder what is going to happen next?"

No. They immediately get to work.

Somebody flat lines and they bring the machinery in and they bring the paddles there and they try and do their thing on the body. They don't sit back and say, "I wonder can this body help itself."

Unless the doctor does something that person will stay dead and that person's next stop will be the morgue.

No, they take dramatic action because the person can't help themselves. And God has taken dramatic action. Even when we were dead he has raised us with Christ. And that is the point in verse five. It is this emphasis of even when. We weren't just sick. We weren't just, you know, [?], but we were dead.

It is like in Ezekiel chapter 37 when Ezekiel looks out over the vast valley of dry bones and the question comes, "Can these bones live?"⁸ Is it possible?

And the answer that is made, "And I looked across the valley and it was full of bones and they were very dry." It almost super emphasizes the dryness of the bones.

And then Ezekiel is called to preach to the bones. Strange thing to do to dry bones that are very dry. And yet Ezekiel is told to preach, to proclaim the Word of God to these bones. And suddenly something starts to happen. Bone comes to bone and flesh and ligaments and sinew start to grow upon the bones and then the whole company of dry bones stand up, a vast army.

One of the amazing things I find about that passage is that even if a level of life had been achieved that just barely was life, you know, they were alive, but just clinging on. But that is not what it says. It says they stood an exceeding great army. So when God does something he does it to the extreme. They were dry bones, but now they are an army ready to fight for God, ready to go into battle for God.

⁶ Ephesians 2:1.

⁷ Ephesians 2:5.

⁸ Ezekiel 37:3.

So Paul is not just saying here, you know, you just fell over to lying and like in a race where you can see somebody is really, really struggling. The line is ahead in a long distance race and the person is really struggling at the end and just at the last bit crawls over the line and just about completes. That is not what he is saying here.

He is saying, “You who were dead are now full of life. You have got real life.”

Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”⁹ So it is not just that we have been, you know, resuscitated and are... you know, and just about there and just hanging on. No, we have the best life. It is like the person who was dead no goes on to win the Olympics. It is that extreme. It is that contrast. And “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”¹⁰

We were dead in trespasses in sins and now we are overcomers. We were hopeless and now we are conquerors. What a contrast. Human depravity conquered by grace. What we were by nature contrasted what we are with the grace of God.

But notice, thirdly, we were not dead to something in verse two. The something that we were not dead to, we weren't dead to everything. But we were not dead to the world and to Satan.

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world.”¹¹ We were alive to the world. “...according to the prince of the power of the air.”¹² The devil was our father. We lived in his family. We walked according to his rules. We lived according to his lifestyle. We followed his ways. We were very much alive.

That is why Paul says in Romans, “When the law came, I died.” Why? Because he was alive in one sense. He was alive to the world. He was alive to the devil. But when the law of God came and smacked into him, he said, “I died. I died to the world. I died to the devil and I became alive to God.”

Clare reminded us then either last week or the week before. She said that we once were slaves of sin. Now we are slaves of righteousness. We were once free of righteousness. Now we are freed of sin.

That is all contrasts.

Compare Colossians 1:21 for a moment. Colossians 1:21 says, “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.”¹³

⁹ John 10:10.

¹⁰ Romans 8:37.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Colossians 1:21.

You see, we were enemies of God. It wasn't that we were neutral. It wasn't that we hadn't made a decision yet. We were enemies of God. We were avowed enemies of the truth.

I recently watched a you tube broadcast of a man who put up 10 reasons why the Bible should be burned or, you know, [?]. And the [?] and inaccuracy of it I won't even mention, but the hatred toward the Word of God, the hatred toward God that was there.

So we were alienated by the hatred that we have, the venom that was in us against the truth of God and God himself. We were friends and followers of the devil, but God has reconciled us.

Look at Ephesians six and verse 12. Ephesians six and verse 12 says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."¹⁴

Listen. We once fought on the devil's army. But now we fight against him.

I don't know if this true. I think one of the movies that was recently made the last few years about the struggles on these islands, I mean, Scotland and England and so on, during one of the battles a mercenary—Don, maybe, maybe you could tell later on if this is true or this is just in the film—the English are going against the Scottish and they line up against each other and regiment of Irish mercenary soldiers. Did you see this one, Pam? I think you did. And there is a regiment of Irish mercenary soldiers on the English side. And as they line up against each other, the Irish can now force and face the Scottish, but as they approach, they turn around and join the Scottish against the English and effect a sort of modern... the lady changed things in history.

But that is what it was for us. There we were standing with the devil. I am not associating the devil, by the way, with the English army, but there we were on the devil's side. And it looked as if we were going to remain in his army but something changed us and now we fight on the Lord's side by grace that we can face the enemy, the real enemy of our souls who is the devil all by grace.

Note, fourthly, in Ephesians chapter two verse three, we were dead by lifestyle and nature. Verse three.

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."¹⁵

So we have got lifestyle in the first part of verse three and then nature. It was the way we lived and it was what we were. We did what our nature dictated. It was our way of life. We were all the same.

¹⁴ Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:3.

See, Paul here identifies himself in verse three. We were all the same. None of us... it is reminiscent of Romans three.

“There is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”¹⁶

We are all the same. We all live exactly the same way, even those of us who seem to be more religious, even those of us who from the outward point of view seemed to be living. We were dead.

Compare 1 Peter—keep your fingers there and turn to 1 Peter chapter four and just two verses, 1 Peter four and verses three and four.

I think Lane quoted these verses recently.

“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”¹⁷

And see the response here of the world.

“Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.”¹⁸

They think that a Christian living for God is a weirdo. There is something wrong with him. There is something strange with him because to them you have become an alien. To them you have become something that they can't understand. How can you enjoy reading the Bible? How can you enjoy singing the praise of God? How can you want to pray and how can you not want to live like the world? You are deceiving yourself. You are fooling yourself. And there is no doubt about it. There is times as believers we do appear like the world and we do live like the world, but the pattern has changed. The pattern has changed and God has made the change in us.

Over in Job chapter 14—this is the last passage I will turn to—Job chapter 14 and reading from verse one. It is a beautiful passage. Job 14 and reading from verse one.

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

¹⁶ Romans 3:22-23.

¹⁷ 1 Peter 4:3.

¹⁸ 1 Peter 4:4.

Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!¹⁹

This by nature we have no hope. We have no hope according to Job unless God does a work, unless God remembers us, unless God transforms us, unless God raises up we have no hope. And that is why now we are going to consider briefly as we close what we are by the grace of God just in the last few moments, what we are by the grace of God.

We spent most of our time considering what we were in our human nature.

Number one in verse four, we are alive to Christ, verses four and five.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together.²⁰

But notice what verse five says. It doesn't just say he has made us alive. For that would only be as good as Adam. No, we are made alive with Christ. In other words, we share in the life of Christ.

You see, the Lord Jesus did not come just to restore what Adam lost. He went much further than that, didn't he? He brought us much further than Adam was. For Adam only had, at best, a provisional guarantee once he obeyed of life. But Christ has given us eternal life. There is no possibility ever again of us being banished from the presence of God. God will never again say, "Depart from me," to the one he has redeemed. No, we have the life of Christ.

Romans five says in due time when we were without what? Without strength, "Christ died for the ungodly."²¹

We were without strength. We couldn't help ourselves.

¹⁹ Job 14:1-13.

²⁰ Ephesians 2:4-5.

²¹ Romans 5:6.

I drove to [?] as we saw yesterday. Joe rang me and said, “You might want to take a different route.” I don’t know if he telephoned anybody else. He said, “You might want to take a different route because, you know, Emily might get upset because there is a large dead dog on the side of the road.”

So I still went that way out of curiosity. I think he shouldn’t have called. I was looking for the dog. Where is the dead dog? I have to see it. So I didn’t say [?], but I [?] it was. There it was dead on the side.

And, you know, it is gone. It is dead without any hope. The only thing we can do with it now is bury it.

When we were without strength, when we were hopeless Christ came to die for us and to give us life.

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”²²

The Son of Man is a common phrase used in the gospels. And if Christ didn’t come, we would have perished.

But then not only did we have the life of Christ in verses four and five, we are exalted with Christ.

I would have been happy to have the life of Christ. But now we [?].

Verse six.

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”²³

Listen. I would have been happy with just getting inside the door of heaven and sneaking in and sort of having the very, very last spot. I would settle for that. That is not what God has given us. God has given us the throne to share, to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

One of my favorite phrases in the Bible, it is Romans eight. The simple phrase is, “The glory which shall be revealed in us.”²⁴ I have mentioned this before. But it is a wonderful phrase, “The glory which shall be revealed in us.”²⁵

Now I would be happy to have the glory of heaven all around me. But it won’t be just that. It is the glory that will be in me. There will be a glory.

²² John 10:10.

²³ Ephesians 2:6.

²⁴ Romans 8:18.

²⁵ Ibid.

I look in me now and I see still a part of my corrupt nature, death and the outward man is decaying. And, as the psalmist could say, “My sin is ever before me.”²⁶

And I see in myself nothing to encourage, but God is going to remove that one day and replace it with glory that only by the grace of God, yes, will look within myself and see nothing but the glory of God.

Do you look forward to that? Do you look forward to that day when you will be able to look into your own mind and not see one sin, not see anything that defiles? You will look into your heart and see nothing but the glory of God. Look into your mind and see nothing but the honor of God in your mind and the desire to love him and serve him that will never be thwarted, that will never beset by Satan, that will never be changed by my own nature which, like a shifting shadow.

Look at chapter one verse 20.

“Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand.”²⁷

That is where we are with Christ. That is where we are with Christ, with Christ. But then we are rich. Not only do we have life, not only are we exalted, but we have riches.

Verse seven.

“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace.”²⁸

Listen, we only have got the beginning now. We are only touching the parameters of the grace of God. There is so much more that we learn in heaven.

“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace.”²⁹

We are like children at the foot of Mount Everest thinking we are wonderful getting up the first few feet. Now there is a whole gigantic mountain to explore and God will spend eternity exploring with us the riches of his grace.

And the word of the Bible that comes to us of the Scriptures seeing these things are so, what manner of people ought we to be?

You see, that is why the devil does not want us to grasp hold of these things. Quite often the reason we live a defeated life as Christians is because we have not fully taken hold of what God has made me in Christ, what God has created in me, what God is making of me, what God is doing in me and through me. And when I grasp hold of those things I am

²⁶ Psalm 51:3.

²⁷ Ephesians 1:20.

²⁸ Ephesians 2:7.

²⁹ Ibid.

given the power to live for Christ. That is why in chapter four verse one, after he spent the first three chapters in Ephesians of showing us all his blessings given to us. Then in chapter four verse one he says, “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”³⁰ Because you have all this, because you have been given so much, because of who you are, you are an ambassador for Christ. You stand for him. You are one with him. You have his life. You have been raised to the heavenly places. You have been made rich in him.

But look at the riches in chapter one verse three. How rich are we? Look at chapter one verse three.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us.”³¹

Literally, “Made us happy.” Why? We have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, everything. Everything, nothing held back, nothing held back.

Listen. Christ on the cross, if we needed evidence that he will hold nothing back, Romans says that he has given us his Son. “How shall he not with him...”³² This is the argument of the apostle. If he has given us his Son on the cross, how shall he not along with him freely give us all things?

We have everything, access to God at any moment, fellowship with God, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

In verses eight and nine, thirdly, we are saved by the grace of Christ alone.

Let me just read what Wesley says in verse eight. “Without any respect to human worthiness he confers the glorious gift of faith and faith with an empty hand, without any pretense to personal dessert or desserts, receives the heavenly blessing and this is not of ourselves. This refers to the whole preceding clause, that ye are saved through faith which is the gift of God.”

Maybe Wesley wasn't an Arminian at all. Maybe he thought he was.

We live of Christ. We are exalted with Christ. We are rich in Christ. We are saved by Christ and his grace.

Finally, we are created in Christ for good works, verse 10.

“For we are his workmanship.”³³

³⁰ Ephesians 4:1.

³¹ Ephesians 1:3.

³² Romans 8:32.

³³ Ephesians 2:10.

You go into a museum and as you walk around the museum you might see a painting by John Smith. You say, “Who is John Smith?” And that is a nice painting.

You walk to the next picture and it is of Tommy Adams. You say, “Who is Tommy Adams?” You know, it is somebody’s painting.

But then you go to the next picture and it says, “Monet.”

And you stand back a bit and say, “Wow. This is the work of Monet.”

And you go to the next one and it says, “Leonardo DaVinci.”

Wow, DaVinci. And all these names that create a sense of awe.

Listen, the angels look at you and say, “Wow. God’s workmanship.”

And you say, “How is that possible? How is that possible?”

Because the angels see what we don’t.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”³⁴

The angels look at us as we would look at the greatest work of art in the greatest museum because they see what God not just has done, but what God is doing now and will do for all eternity. We are the masterpiece of God.

That is why in Ephesians it says in verse 22:

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.³⁵

The Church is his body. The Church is the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Christ poured himself completely into his Church.

We are far greater than any work of art that this world has ever known. We are the bride of Christ. We are his precious possession. We are the apple of his eye, he who loves us with an everlasting love. What manner of people ought we to be for the one who has loved us with such love?

Let us pray.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ephesians 1:22-23.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessings of the gospel. We thank you for the love of Christ that has been shed abroad in our hearts. We thank you, Lord, that we live in him, that we have been raised together with him, that we have been given all the riches of Christ, that we have been saved by him and given such a mission to live for him. What we were—hopeless, helpless, without God in the world—but now as the rest of the chapter reminds us “ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

As we turn to the Lord’s Table, sanctify our minds and hearts that we may rejoice in what Christ has done for his bride. Amen.