

IV. Lesson 4: The Resurrection Power – Ephesians 2:1-10

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Stuart chapter 4

Aim: To praise God for our salvation which by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

In chapter 1 Paul looked at salvation from God's point of view, showing how He has blessed us with all blessings in Christ and how one day all things shall be subjected to Christ. In chapter 2 he talks about salvation from the perspective of the individual Christian. Paul wants to demonstrate the great truth begun in chapter 1 that both Jew and Gentile are brought together into the body of the church. But before he does so he shows that both Jew and Gentile alike have received new life in and with the risen Christ. He shows us what we were before God's work in calling us to Christ, what God did for us in Christ, and what we are now to become and do as the result of that working.

Like 1:3-14, this section (2:1-10) is one long sentence in the original Greek. There is a conceptual unity to this passage. It begins with us being *dead* in trespasses and sins in which you formerly *walked* (v. 1), while the passage ends with us being *created* for good works that we should *walk* in them (v. 10).

The beginning of Ephesians chapter 2 is one of the most pivotal portions of the apostolic writings dealing with the question of our sinful nature. In the perennial controversy between Augustinianism and various types of semi-Pelagianism, such as Arminianism, this passage is also pivotal, because the debate rages over how much moral ability natural, fallen man has left after mankind suffered spiritual death in Adam.

The question, of course, reaches its climax with the issue of whether or not a person who is unregenerate, who has not been quickened by the Holy Spirit, can, in any way, incline himself or turn himself with affection towards Christ. Classical Reformed theology is insistent that man is so fallen that he has no disposition, inclination, or bent towards the things of Christ, and would never respond to the call of the gospel unless first the Holy Spirit changed the disposition of the heart through regeneration.

A. Dead in Trespasses & Sins (Eph. 2:1-3)

- *What does it mean to be dead in our trespasses and sins (2:1)?*

1. Trespasses & Sins (2:1)

We have trespassed (*parapatōma*), or missed the mark, and sinned (*hamartia*), or deviated from the proper path. In other words, we have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) by commission (transgressing) and by omission (falling short of God's standard). The result is alienation, or spiritual separation from God, for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

In the Old Testament, there is a slightly different distinction between 'trespasses' and 'sins.' 'Trespasses' consider our rebellion against God as debt. When we commit a trespass, we incur a debt. Thus, the Old Testament trespass offering was connected with the payment of a debt. Our debt continually mounts up as we continue to trespass. It is the riches of the grace of Christ that pays our debts.

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When the Old Testament distinguishes ‘sins’ from ‘trespasses,’ it is referring to uncleanness. The sin offering was to take care of uncleanness. From this point of view, when we sin, we continue to become more and more unclean. Practically, in the Old Testament it meant that you were farther and farther removed from the sanctuary. To be unclean means that you are driven farther away by degrees from the presence of God: from the Most Holy Place to the Holy Place, to the temple courtyard, to outside the temple, to outside the land, to the world, and ultimately to hell. The more we sin, the farther we are removed from God. So God not only provides riches to take care of our debt, but He also draws near to us to deal with this problem of distance.

2. Dead (2:1)

It is important to notice that Paul uses the term ‘dead’ (*nekros*) showing that the former spiritual state of these people was moribund, lifeless, and inert. Deadness is a universal human condition. Of course, Paul is speaking about spiritual death, for outside of Christ there is no life. Even when non-Christians are exposed to all the external influence to which Christians are exposed, it means nothing to them. God’s Word meets with silence. There is no response. They are dead.

Like a spiritual corpse, a sinner is unable to make a single move toward God, think a single thought about God, or even correctly respond to God—unless God is first present to bring the spiritually dead person to life, which is what Paul says He does do. The kind of death Paul talks about is a strange one—one in which, although dead, the sinner nevertheless walks about quite actively in sin. He is dead toward God, but he is alive to all wickedness.

The apostle is not saying that fallen man lacks a will. The problem is not that man does not have the capacity to choose, his problem is that he has no desire for God. The desires of man’s heart in his natural state are only wicked continuously, turned away from God. Jesus gives the definitive statement about our helpless condition, apart from the grace of God, in John 6:44 – ‘No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.’

Another way to think about being spiritually dead is to be under judgment (*cp.* Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve died when they sinned. They incurred debt when they stole from God, and they were kicked out of the garden, separated by distance because they were unclean. So, Paul tells the Gentiles that they were dead, under judgment, and it was a progressive judgment that continually got worse and worse as their debts mounted up and they became further and further removed from God through their sins.

3. Sons of Disobedience (2:2)

Verse 2 describes the disobedience of the Gentiles. ‘Walk’ (*peripateō*) describes a lifestyle; in this case one lived according to an authority contrary to God. This authority is expressed in three ways, in terms of its power in the world, its spiritual nature, and its activity in human lives.

Firstly, it is that which is in accordance with ‘the course (*aiōn* or ‘age’) of this world (*kosmos*).’ These two Greek words are often used in the New Testament to contrast the life of humanity apart from God. Both words express a whole social value-system which is alien to God. It is a pattern that permeates, indeed dominates, non-Christian society and holds people in captivity. So, for the Gentiles, Paul focuses on this external pattern of behavior and says that we are enslaved by the world.

Secondly, this pattern is set up by Satan; it is ‘following the prince (*archōn*) of the power (*exousia*) of the air (*aēr*).’ It is the pattern established by Satan in the Garden. This is the pattern

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of disobedience and rebellion that Adam and Eve create when they Fall. It is a pattern of role reversal, rebellion against God, conflict among mankind. This pattern grows and intensifies and works its way out in Cain, as he kills his brother, and then into the rest of humanity.

By speaking of the devil's authority as 'in the air,' Paul's thought was of an evil power with control in the world (*cp.* 6:12), but whose existence was not material but spiritual. 'The air' is the sphere in which the inhabitants of the world live and which constitutes the seat of Satan's authority. The devil becomes the prince of the power of the air – he rules over the world until the ascension of Christ who now rules over it.

In the third place, Paul speaks of the authority of 'the spirit (*pneumatōs*) that is now at work (*energountos*) in the sons (*huios*) of disobedience (*apeitheia*).' The old life, without the energizing of God (*cp.* 1:11, 20), is subject to the energizing (*energountos*) of the powers of evil, controlled by 'the spirit' which has the evil one as its source. Just like Cain and the rest of the unbelieving Gentiles, they were not filled with the Holy Spirit, but with the prince of the power of the air. Thus, we are also enslaved by the devil. It is through the evil spirit or outlook present in the world that he rules us.

4. Lusts of the Flesh (2:3a)

The apostle had begun to speak of Gentiles, but now he changes to the first person and so includes himself and 'all' his people as 'among' the children of disobedience or wrath. Thus, verse 3 is describing the Jews. Paul doesn't say that the Jews walked according to the pattern of the cosmos, because they didn't. They were delivered from the bondage of the pattern of the external world through the covenant of God. However, that didn't deliver them from sin and trespass, because internally they were still corrupt. So, when Paul talks about the Jews, he talks about the inward problem. For the Jews, the focus is on inward corruption.

We are also in slavery to our flesh. The 'flesh' (*sarkos*) means fallen human nature. It is the word the Bible uses to speak of abject selfishness. All that mattered to us was our own self-centered world of indulgence, ambition, and pleasure. We were godless and subject to another power. The universal condition of humanity is to continually indulge our sinful desires.

Even though the Jews were delivered from the external pattern of Satan, they were still slaves to the internal lusts of the flesh. The sinful pattern was still in their hearts. There is no Greek dichotomy between body and mind – the body being unclean but the mind being clean. No, both body and mind are corrupt – it is the whole man who is corrupt.

5. Children of Wrath (2:3b)

Paul says finally that the Jews, 'like the rest of mankind (*hoi loipoi*, as many Jews disparagingly called the Gentiles) were by nature children of wrath.' In the New Testament, the chief terms for 'wrath' are *thumos* (from a root which means 'to rush along fiercely' or 'be in a heat of violence') and *orgē*, the term used in verse 3. *Orgē* comes from a root meaning 'to grow ripe for something' and indicates God's gradually building and intensifying opposition to sin.

God's wrath is consistent, controlled, and judicial. 'Wrath' is anger in action. The doctrine of wrath does not mean that God merely gets angry from time to time, lashes out in anger, and then forgets about it. That is what a sinful human might do in his anger. It is rather that God's wrath is an inevitable and growing opposition to all that is opposed to His righteousness.

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God is holy. His anger is therefore pure. God is angry with sin and He is angry with those who commit sin. He is actively angry with sinners. To be a child of wrath, one is necessarily the enemy of God. God's wrath is never arbitrary but rather is His personal hostility toward evil. God does not compromise with evil, nor with our lustful indulgences (2:3), but instead condemns them. Living under His wrath is such a marked characteristic of their lives that they are described here as 'children of wrath.' It is the distinctive feature of their lives. They live the whole of their life with God's anger hanging over them.

We were like that 'by nature (*phusis*)' 'Nature' does not refer to man as originally created but refers to the fallen character of man. Paul reminds us that we were born that way. We did not *become* sinners. We have always been sinners, which is why we sin. The bottom line for both Jew and Gentile is the same – they are all children of wrath, sons of disobedience, just like Cain.

B. Alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-7)

God has delivered us from all this. He has solved the two problems of the Gentiles and Jews – the external pattern of the world, and the internal corruption of the heart. This is the subject of verses 4-7.

1. But God (2:4)

Our position as sinners (apart from God) is hopeless for three reasons. First, we are '*dead* in our transgressions and sins.' This means that we are no more able to help ourselves spiritually than a corpse is able to improve its condition. Second, we are *enslaved* by sin. This spiritual death is a strange thing. Although we are dead in sin so far as our ability to respond to God is concerned, we are nevertheless alive enough to be quite active in the practice of wickedness. Third, we are under God's just sentence for our transgressions so that we are 'by nature objects of wrath.'

'But God!' Here is where the beauty and wonder of the Christian gospel comes in. We were hopelessly lost in wickedness. But God has intervened to save us, and He has saved us by intervening sovereignly and righteously in each of these areas.

'But God' (*de theos*) are two words that carry the entire meaning of grace, for these two monosyllables indicate God's initiative and action on behalf of mankind. These two words tell what God has done, how God has intervened in what otherwise was an utterly hopeless situation. 'But God!' The intervention of those words and what they represent make all the difference. If you want to understand Reformed theology, read verses 4-5 a thousand times. It is the thematic passage of the gospel.

Why did God save us? Because He is rich in mercy (*elegos*), and because of His great love (*agapē*) for us (2:4). Why He chose us to believe is an unanswerable question, for we surely did not deserve His favor. Mercy (*eleos*) is not receiving what you deserve. Grace (*charis*) is receiving what you don't deserve. The richness of God's mercy takes care of our trespasses – He pays the debts we owe. His great love takes care of our sins, because if you love someone you pull them close. Sins create distance between us and God, but His love draws us near to Him.

2. Alive with Christ (2:5)

- *How were we made alive (2:5)?*

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The word ‘together’ in verse 5 and twice in verse 6 is given in the Greek by adding the prepositional prefix *syn-* to the verb. Paul coined these words to describe what God did with Jesus after His crucifixion. Paul used it thus to express a union with Christ (*cp.* Rom. 6:6, 8; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11-12). The preposition here may also carry the hint of the fact that from whatever racial or national background people may have come, they are brought into this new life in Christ in fellowship together, a theme that is developed fully in the next section.

First, we were dead to sins, but God ‘made us (both Jew and Gentile) alive (*synzōopoiēō*) with Christ’. As dead men, we need God to breathe His Spirit into us, to make us alive with Christ. God’s breath is given graciously and mercifully to those He has chosen from the beginning (1:4).

Union with Christ is a central part of the gospel’s teaching. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, His death was reckoned to be your death, which is why all your sins are considered to have been punished. Not only so, but His resurrection was reckoned to be your resurrection. You were reckoned to have risen from the dead at the same moment. This is already seen in your spiritual resurrection. It is only a matter of time before it will also be seen in your bodily resurrection at the end of the world. Such resurrection comes to you through your union with Christ, in whom you were chosen.

We were once dead and now we live as a result of our union with Christ. A dead person is unconscious of what is around him, inactive, and in a process of bodily decay. This was true of us spiritually. We were unconscious of God, inactive in God’s service, and decaying morally. Now we are alive to God, working for God, and growing in practical righteousness. This is the most profound transformation imaginable, and it is true of all Christians. Chapter 1 showed us that His power wrenched His Son from the grave and raised Him to an endless life. That very same power is what reached down to bring about our conversion. It was a resurrection indeed!

3. In the Heavenly Places (2:6)

Secondly, He has ‘raised us up together (*synergeirō*) and made us sit together (*synkathizō*) in the heavenly (*epouranios*) places in Christ Jesus.’ There are no slaves in heaven. So, if we have been raised up with Christ and been made to sit in the heavenly realms in Him, it is as free men and women. Sin’s shackles have been broken, and we are freed to act righteously and serve God effectively in this world.

The words ‘raised up’ do not apply to the resurrection but to what we more normally call the ascension. Having been raised from the dead, Jesus was taken up into heaven, and we are said to have been raised up to heavenly places in Him. How so? Our being raised from the dead with Christ means that we have been given a new life or a new disposition. Our being taken up into heaven with Christ, our ascension, means that we have been given a new environment. We are no longer creatures only of this world. We are now creatures of the greater, heavenly realm who now, because of our union with Christ, think and work and speak in spiritual categories. More than that, the Christian recognizes that he belongs more to heaven than to earth.

In 1:3, the apostle has said that God has ‘blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.’ Now he says more specifically that our life has come to be there, enthroned with Christ. Raised with Him, we are seated with Him ‘in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ The verb is in the aorist or past tense. It means that we have already been made to sit with God in Christ. That is our position now. That is where we have arrived, and we are to live accordingly.

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When Paul writes that Christ is seated, he means that Jesus is on the throne and has dominion over all things. But Paul also stresses that believers, who are united with Christ in a spiritual resurrection, have also been given dominion over the world. Just as Christ is seated above all rule and authority, we are seated with Him over all power and dominion. That is why we can pray. We are on the inside, with immediate access to the throne. Of course, we do not rule in our own right, but because we are co-heirs with Christ. One way in which we are involved is through prayer in which we make petitions to Him concerning different areas.

Because Christ has been elevated, Satan is no longer the prince of the power of the air. The Book of Revelation shows Satan being cast down by Michael the archangel – Satan is no longer lifted up high – Christ is, and we are seated with Him.

4. Ages to Come (2:7)

Third, God has dealt with the wrath question. In our sins we are indeed ‘objects of wrath’ (v. 3). But since Jesus has suffered in our place for our sin and we have been delivered from it, we are no longer under wrath. Instead we are objects of ‘the incomparable riches (*ploutos*) of God’s grace (*charis*), expressed in His kindness (*chrēstotēs*) to us in Christ Jesus.’

Why is this? God has raised us up to demonstrate in the ages to come the riches of His grace. Here are more riches of God on display. God not only pays out debts, but He also gives us more riches so that we become wealthy. We become kings and queens, raised up and seated at the right hand of God. Not only are we drawn near to God, not only are our debts forgiven, but we are given all these riches. God doesn’t just take care of the negative things; He also gives us all the positive benefits that we may grow in righteousness.

The verb used is *endeiknymi*, which means ‘to display’ or ‘to show’ rather than simply to make known. The church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ. That grace, moreover, is expressed ‘in kindness,’ a word that denotes love in action, personal pity, and help rendered where it was needed most.

This involvement in the heavenly realms is still at the beginning stage because the reign of Christ and His people is eternal, it will last forever. Throughout endless ages the universe will be in perpetual astonishment – sinners are with God in His home! All that God is and has done will be admired in that everlasting glory.

C. The Grace of God (Eph. 2:8-10)

- *If we are saved by grace as a gift of God (2:8), how do we answer the critics who say that Jesus commended people for their faith? Doesn’t this show that faith is an individual choice and not a gift?*
- *What does it mean to be God’s workmanship (2:10)? What, then is the evidence of the power of a new life?*

1. The Gift of God (2:8)

The statement made parenthetically in verse 5 – ‘by grace you have been saved’ – is repeated, expanded, and expounded here.

There has been an ongoing controversy on the structure of this verse. The question arises, what is the antecedent of ‘this’ or ‘it’ in the text where it says, ‘by grace (*charis*) you have been saved,

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through faith (*pistis*) – and *this* is not from yourselves, *it* is the gift (*dōron*) of God.’ Does *this* refer to salvation? Or does *this* refer to faith? Is Paul saying that salvation is a gift of God? Or is he saying that faith itself is a gift of God? Theologically it doesn’t matter. In both ways of reading that sentence, we have to come to the conclusion that faith is a gift of God. Every believer should be praising God daily for the fact that he has received as a gift not only the salvation that comes through faith, but the gift of faith itself.

‘Grace’ is defined simply as ‘unmerited favor’ or ‘undeserved benefit.’ Christians are redeemed not because of merit or good works, but by grace and by *grace alone*. That is the essence of Reformed theology, and that is the essence of Pauline theology.

What is God’s grace? In one word, it is ‘salvation.’ The Greek word for ‘saved’ is *sesōsmenoi*, a participle in the perfect tense. The perfect tense in Greek indicates an action completed in the past that has continuing effect in the present and in the future. *Sesōsmenoi* emphasizes a completed saving act, the effect of which has abiding consequences.

But if we are saved through faith, doesn’t this mean that we exercise faith? And if so, doesn’t it mean that we have a part in our own salvation? Many people mistakenly believe they have a part to play in their own salvation. Once allowed by God, we can appropriate His gift of salvation unto ourselves. Appropriation is by the exercising of our faith, but faith does not precede the gift. Otherwise, choosing God by grasping the gift would be an example of our works.

Salvation and faith are not two separate things. The act of trusting Christ is part of salvation. Salvation in its totality is God’s gift of grace to us. It follows that faith is His gift. How is it that you could not believe, but you do now? What made the difference? Did you suddenly improve? No; God was gracious to you. He gave salvation to you. It was sheer grace that brought you to believe and receive.

2. No Boasting (2:9)

We are taken back to the terminology of Romans and Galatians – ‘not because of works (*ergon*)’ – and to what was a vital question for the Jews of Paul’s day because of their exaltation of the law. But such is the human heart, and so great is the temptation of people in every age and race to deceive themselves into thinking that their lives are good enough for God, that the reminder of this verse is needed still. If this salvation is of God’s grace and received simply through faith, it is ‘not because of works’ (Rom. 3:20; 4:1-5; Gal. 2:16; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5).

The whole grace-through-faith experience, in its entirety, is God’s gift to us. None of it has its origin in us. If it did, we would have at least something to congratulate ourselves on. We would not have much to be proud about, but we would have *something*. But Paul rejects this completely. There is nothing at all on which we can flatter ourselves. Salvation is not a result of our works, which would give us the right to boast (*kauchaomai*). There are no prideful people in heaven, only those who are thankful for God’s grace. The only merit that can get me into heaven is the merit of Jesus Christ.

We should not boast, because boasting is the opposite of faith. The proud man is totally self-sufficient. The proud man is boastful who does not depend on others. The thankful man is grateful because he knows he is dependent on God. The man who has faith thanks someone else and is dependent on someone else. The boastful man is ungrateful. Salvation is through grace – we must be thankful and full of gratitude, not boasting or self-sufficient. It is for our own good that we have nothing to boast about. If we did do some small thing worth boasting of, our sinful

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hearts would latch onto that and it would eventually destroy your faith. So the Bible repeatedly stresses that there is nothing for us to boast about – it is 100% by grace and we are dependent.

3. God's Workmanship (2:10)

There is a striking repetition of the word 'works' in verses 9 and 10. The first mention of works is negative. It tells us in no uncertain terms that we are not saved 'by works,' by anything that we did or can do. This verse utterly repudiates the idea that works contribute in any measure to our justification. However, no sooner has Paul rejected the role of works in justification than he immediately brings it in again, saying that God has created us precisely 'to do good works.'

The Greek word for 'workmanship' (*poiēma*) is from a different root to the 'works' (*ergon*) of the previous verse, and is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Romans 1:20, where it is used of the works of God's first creation. There is a new divine act of creation, for 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Roman Catholic formula for justification was this: faith plus works equals justification. The Reformation view of it was this: faith which leads to works equals justification. That is, if a person is justified, he is not justified on the basis of the works, by the works, or through the works, but his is justified *to* the works. The performance of works is the result of faith and the fruit of justification.

Some people think that we live good lives *in order to be* saved. How wrong they are! We live good lives *because we are* saved. We hold out no hope of being saved by works. But one of the reasons for which God has saved us is that we should live differently on this earth.

We have been created in Christ for good works. We haven't been created for trespasses and sins, according to pattern of the prince of the power of this air. Rather, we have been created according to the pattern of Christ for good works. We don't want Satan's pattern; we want God's pattern.

God has 'prepared them beforehand, that we should walk in them.' This then corresponds closely with 1:4 which describes the end and goal of election as 'that we should be holy and blameless before Him.' The purpose for which we have been chosen is to be conformed to the image of Christ, to be servants of God, to be people of obedience who live lives of godliness and righteousness.

D. Application Questions

- *Because God was gracious to me, I also need to be gracious. What are practical ways I can show grace to others, particularly non-believers, this week?*
- *I understand that God saved me in order that I may perform good works and give Him the glory. What can I do this week that will glorify God?*

For next time: Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and read Stuart chapter 5.