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By Grace Through Faith

The first ten verses of this Ephesians 2 divides very helpfully into three parts. In verses 1-3 Paul speaks of us being dead in trespasses and sins. In verses 4-7 he speaks of the rich mercy of God and how he has made us alive in Christ. In verses 8-10 Paul speaks of the process of our salvation as being accomplished by grace through faith.

Dead in Sin: Ephesians 2:1-3

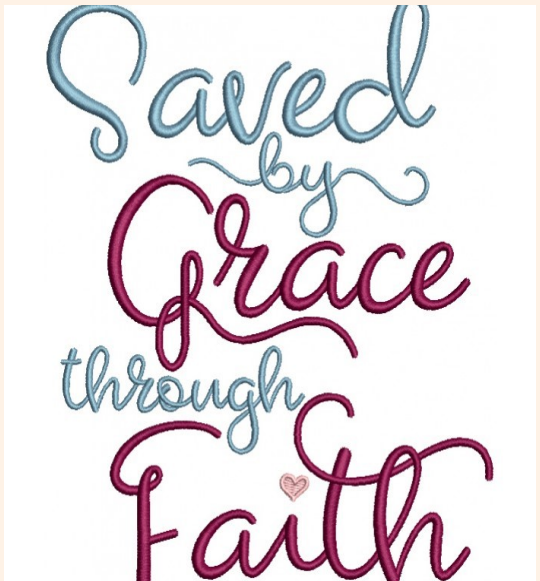
And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

When we walk after the course of this world, we are dead to grace and alive to sin. Paul states it this way in Romans 6:15-18, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

John tells us in 1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Paul states later in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.”

Paul says that we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh. Even the Apostle Paul had this struggle with the flesh? Indeed, he did. Listen to what Paul says about himself in Romans 7:14-20, “For we know



that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

Paul describes here the battle that we all fight within. No one is immune to this struggle. In the lyrics of Virgil P. Brock (1918), “I was lost in sin, but Jesus rescued me. I was bound by fear, but Jesus set me free. He’s a wonderful savior to me.”

We often sing the words of Cleavant Derricks (1937), “I once was lost in sin, but Jesus took me in, and then a little light from heaven filled my soul; it bathed my heart in love and wrote my name above, and just a little talk with Jesus made me whole. Sometimes my path seems drear, without a ray of cheer, and then a cloud of doubt may hide the light of day. The mists of sin may rise and hide the starry skies, but just a little talk with Jesus clears the way. I may have doubts and fears; my eyes be filled with tears, but Jesus is a friend who watches day and night. I go to him in prayer; he knows my every care, and just a little talk with Jesus makes it right.”

As the writer of Hebrews assures us, “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 1:18). The assurance of Ephesians 2:1 is that he makes us alive! We were dead in our sins, but we have been made alive in Christ. Praise God!

God is Rich in Mercy: Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

King David prayed to God in his plea for mercy, “Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin” (Psa. 51:1-2).

David recognized God’s lovingkindness and his tender mercy. The psalmist rejoices in Psalm 13:5-6, “But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me”

Are we trusting in God’s mercy? Do we understand how much the Lord wants to save us? Have we fully comprehended the lengths to which God has gone to redeem us?

One of the most quoted passages in the Bible states: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16-17).

God so loved that he gave. God so loved that he might save. The language of Paul in these verses is remarkably like that which he uses in Romans 6 and Colossians 2. “Therefore we were buried with

Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). “In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of your sinful nature, with the circumcision performed by Christ and not by human hands. And having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses, having canceled the debt ascribed to us in the decrees that stood against us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross! And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:11-15).

Burton Coffman writes in his commentary on these verses, “The full meaning of this verse is that Christians who have been baptized into Christ, therein being ‘made alive together with Christ’ and being ‘raised up with him,’ are partakers of the full rights and privileges of the heavenly kingdom. People have removed baptism from their own theology, but they have not removed it from that of Paul.”

Grace Through Faith: Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Our salvation and our sanctification are worked out by grace through faith. Grace is what God does. It emanates from his great love for us, and it is demonstrated in the sacrifice of his only begotten son on the cross. Faith is man’s proper response to God’s grace. It is produced by hearing the word of God and then obeying.

It is instructive to look at the word ‘works’ in verses 9 and 10. In both verses it is forms of the same Greek word ‘*ergon*’. Strong’s 2041 *érgon* (from *ergō*, “to work, accomplish”) – a work or worker who accomplishes something. 2041 */érgon* (“work”) is a deed (action) that carries out (completes) an inner desire (intension, purpose).

So, Paul is talking about ‘deeds or actions’ in both verses. However, we know that there is nothing but the blood of Jesus that can take away sin. We are saved by God’s grace. However, we must respond to God’s grace in faith.

In verse 9 Paul says, “it is not of works, lest anyone should boast.” What kinds of works is he talking about here? He is talking about works of self. I can never obligate God to save me by anything that I might do. The fact is that I could never keep the Law perfectly, so I could not be saved by Law keeping.

An example of the difference between works of self and works ordained of God is found in Genesis 22:1, “Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”

The offering of Isaac was not a work of self. It wasn’t Abraham’s idea at all. God told Abraham to go and offer Isaac. All along the way Abraham was walking by faith, “But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together” (Gen. 22:7-8).

Abraham’s faith was perfected, or made complete, in obedience. The promise is assured to Abraham again and the Angel says to him, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:18).

This is a wonderful illustration from the Bible of how grace works through faith. If our salvation was based solely on God’s grace, then everyone would be saved, and no one would be lost. If anyone were lost it would be a failure of God’s grace. However, man must respond in faith to God’s grace, and when he does it is not a work of self but by works ordained of God just as Paul said God has ordained that we should walk in them. So, in verse 9 Paul speaks about works of self which cannot save us, but in verse 10 he speaks of works ordained of God and we are to walk in these.

Notice James statement about a faith that is alive and one that is dead (Jas. 2:14-24):

What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can

faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

We must remember again that the works James has in mind here are not works of self but works ordained of God. An illustration may prove helpful for our understanding of how grace through faith works in our lives. The gift, or grace we could say, is a ham that is promised to those who believe. Suppose we determined beforehand that we were going to give a free ham to everyone who brought their water bill to a designated location on Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. What we have done is set the conditions or works ordained by this grace. It is an open invitation to those who will respond and comply with the stipulations we placed on the gift. They must bring a water bill; they must come on Friday; and they must come between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. If they choose to come on Monday or Tuesday or any other day, they will not receive the ham. Not because we didn’t want them to have one, but because they did

not respond in faith. If they show up on Friday at 3:00 p.m. they will also miss out because they have failed to act in faith. If they show up on Friday at 9:00 a.m. but they fail to bring a water bill, they will again fail the test of faith.

There are certain works ordained by God that we should walk in, and when we do, we are acting in faith. We are proving our faith is alive. These are not works of self, but they are works ordained by God.

We conclude this study with the message of all ambassadors of Christ Jesus found in 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2:

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says:

“In an acceptable time I have heard you,

And in the day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

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The Baptism of Jesus

There are a few scenes recorded in the Bible that I wish I could have been there to see. One of those scenes is the baptism of Jesus. I have often pictured this scene as an image of power, of authority, an image of a king who reigns.

The Gospel of Mark is a fast-paced gospel. Mark uses very few words as he transitions from one scene or event to the next. For first time readers of the Bible, the Gospel of Mark is a good place to start because it moves so quickly. Mark is on a

mission. He has good news to share and as you read you can almost feel his excitement and urgency he has as he tells the story of Jesus. Unlike Luke or Matthew, Mark jumps right into the baptism of Jesus. For those who have spent some time reading God's Word, Mark's account of Jesus' baptism are familiar words. However, as we pause to consider them we find a few powerful images.

Mark 1:9-11 (New King James Version)

"It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

One question often asked about Jesus baptism is, "Why was Jesus baptized?" This is a very good question considering what we read in the New Testament about baptism and the life of Jesus. John the immerser was baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins (ref. Mk.1:4). On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached that people should repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (ref. Acts 2:38). We read in the New Testament that people were baptized for the remission of their sins. The Scriptures also teach us that Jesus was without sin. The apostle Paul recorded in (2 Cor. 5:21) that Jesus "knew no sin". In (Hebrews 4:15) we read, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." The "High Priest" in this verse is speaking of Jesus. If baptism is for the remission of sin and Jesus had no sin, why was Jesus baptized? The Gospel of Matthew provides some insight for us concerning this question.

Matthew 3: 13-15

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him."

Jesus says the purpose of His baptism was to "fulfill all righteousness". Jesus was baptized to completely keep and fulfill the command of God. Coffman provides the following thoughts in his

commentary of these verses.

"Jesus, although He had no sins to repent of, honored and delighted in keeping the commands of God" [1]

Baptism, as we read in the New Testament, is for the remission of sin. Jesus had no sins of which to repent. However, He was baptized to fulfill the word of God as He took delight in keeping God's Word.

The Messiah

One of the images we see in Jesus' baptism is the image of the Messiah. Mark states the purpose of his gospel in the opening sentence. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mk. 1:1). Mark's purpose for writing his gospel account is to tell about the good news of Jesus. At times we read the word "Christ" as the last name of Jesus. However, this word means "anointed, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word rendered "Messiah." [2] In this first sentence of Mark's Gospel, Mark is proclaiming and revealing the truth of Jesus, God's Messiah. God, in a voice from heaven and the Spirit descending upon Jesus both attest to the truth of who Jesus is. Jesus is God's anointed, the Messiah. Christ is not His last name but a title. At the baptism of Jesus, the Messiah is revealed. This is good news!

A King and His Kingdom

Children's Bibles have the tendency to picture Jesus' baptism as a peaceful scene with a clean flowing river and fluffy white clouds set against the backdrop of a clear blue sky. There may be nothing wrong with this peaceful picture however, Mark may be expressing more.

Mark 1:10

"And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove."

Mark records the heavens "parting" and in doing so, he uses a very specific word. The word used has more of the meaning of the heavens being torn open or torn apart. It is the same word used in (Mk. 15:38) to describe the veil of the temple and how it was torn from top to bottom. We see in Jesus' baptism an image of power as the heavens are

ripped opened and torn back. As this dramatic scene unfolds, the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. This image, to readers of Mark's Gospel and perhaps to those who were present that day, might bring to remembrance the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 11:2-5

"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist."

The announcement of Jesus' baptism is of a judge who will rule in knowledge. One who will judge fairly and with impartial justice. One who will slay the wicked, who will be righteous and faithful. The Messiah has come in Whom God is well pleased. The good news of God's reign and of His rule is here as Jesus Himself would proclaim in (Mk. 1:14) "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Provider

The parting of the heavens as Jesus comes up out of the water brings to remembrance another famous parting that we read about in the Old Testament. God parted the Red Sea as He led His people out of captivity from the land of Egypt (ref. Ex. 14). God leading His people out of the land of Egypt was God delivering His people. Oppressed and under the heavy hand of the Egyptians, the Hebrews were in bondage and slavery. As God parted the Red Sea, His people passed through the waters to their freedom. Their captors were overtaken and lost to the water. It was a time of God's deliverance and His rescue as He provided the way of their salvation. In Jesus and at His baptism we are reminded of His provision.

The Way of Escape

Much as when God led His people out of the land of Egypt, today Jesus provides a way for us. The

apostle Paul teaches us that we are in bondage and held captive by our sin (ref. Rom. 6:20). We are set free from our sin as we follow His Word. Entering the water, we are immersed and raised to newness of life. The apostle Paul speaks of our baptism mirroring the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised to walk in newness of life (ref. Rom. 6:1-4). Mirroring Jesus in baptism we are united together with Him in the likeness of His death. And as Paul continued to record, "certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). Sin, in our life, being done away with we are set free. (ref. Rom 6:6-11). In Jesus, we find our escape as Jesus provides a way for us to be released from our bondage.

A Powerful Image

The baptism of Jesus is a powerful image. More than just an image, His baptism is a revelation of who He is. Jesus is God's Messiah. The King who has come to rule and reign. The One who provides our way of escape.

I may wish I could have been present on this day to witness firsthand this powerful image of God's wisdom, His power, and provision. I am thankful for Mark, a gospel writer inspired by the Holy Spirit who recorded the events and teaching of Jesus' life. Mark was excited to share this good news of Jesus! I am thankful we have this account to read so that we can know Jesus as He is revealed.

Blessings!

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notes:

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[1] Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary On the Gospel Of Matthew*, Vol. I, A.C.U. Press, 1984. p. 30-31

[2] Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.



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