

Ephesians Sermon Illustrations 2

EPHESIANS SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR DAILY BREAD, et. al.

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We All Need Jesus

Ephesians 2:1

February 24, 1996

A Christian couple told their sons to be kind to the boys next door but not to become close companions with them. They explained that these boys could get them in trouble because of their dirty talk, their fighting, and their disrespectful attitude.

When the father of those boys learned this, he was angry. "You think your kids are too good for mine," he said one day to the other father. "No," the believer quietly replied. "My kids have so many bad traits that they need all the encouragement they can get in the right direction. In fact, we too are sinners who need forgiveness. That's why we believe on Jesus Christ. We're not better than you or your boys."

Even the best among us, young or old, think and act in sinful ways. We need the forgiveness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and we need Him to help us live a life that pleases God.

The rich young ruler in Luke 18 was outwardly religious and morally upright. But Jesus showed him his basic inner selfishness (Eph 2:22, 23). He too needed forgiveness. He too needed a new birth and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let's not deceive ourselves. No matter how bad or how good we may be, we all need Jesus. --H V Lugt

Naught have I gotten but what I received,
Grace has bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase--
I'm only a sinner saved by grace! --Gray

No one is good enough to save himself;
no one is so bad that God cannot save him.

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AUTISTIC LISTENERS

Ephesians 2:1

Hear now this ... [ye] ... who have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord. Jeremiah 5:21, 22

Recently the London Times stated that there are about 4,000 autistic children in Britain. These unfortunate youngsters usually do not react to messages received and transmitted from the eyes and ears to the brain. Consequently, they live in a world where words have little or no meaning. This is a terrible physical affliction, but my mind immediately was drawn to the oft-repeated words of our Lord concerning the listeners in His day who were thus spiritually afflicted. Of them He said, "Hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:13). The reason for such "autistic" listeners is clear. Unconverted men are spiritually "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Only as the Holy Spirit enlightens them and gives them life in Christ can they "hear his voice" and follow Him.

A certain ungodly tavern keeper who was very fond of music decided to attend one of John Wesley's Methodist gatherings in order to hear the singing. He had resolved, however, not to listen to the sermon, and therefore sat with his head down and his fingers in his ears. But when God wants to speak to a soul, He can make His voice heard even if He uses means that may seem strange to us. As the man stubbornly refused to listen, a fly lit upon his nose. For a moment he moved his hand to drive it away, and in so doing, nine words of the sermon were brought to his attention: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." From that moment the man had no rest in his soul. He came to the next meeting, listened eagerly to the Gospel, and was saved. Have you heard the Savior's voice? "Hear, and your soul shall live!"

I hear Thy welcome voice,
That calls me, Lord, to Thee,
For cleansing in Thy precious blood
That flowed on Calvary. — Hartsough

There is no one so deaf as the person who refuses to hear!

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New Life

Ephesians 2:1-7

May 9, 2001

For a long time the old church sat empty and abandoned in a Detroit neighborhood. The decaying building blended naturally into the whole area. Storefronts were boarded up. An old school building was padlocked. Party stores flourished, but little else. Grim, unswept, forgotten—that's how it all looked.

Then one night things changed. The old church sparkled with light. Parked cars lined the streets. The sound of music filled the air. What had been dead and abandoned had come to life.

I've seen people like that. For years they were dark and empty like that old church. There was little inside except anger, selfishness, and pride. Then one day all was changed. Suddenly the darkness was gone. It was as if someone had turned on the lights.

And that Someone is God. He forgives those who come to Him through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. He specializes in giving new life to those who seem to be beyond hope—those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

If all this sounds unfamiliar, it may be because we've lost sight of the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Let's remember what He has done for us, and what He can do for others. —Mart De Haan

Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss,
And by the power of His cross
Transforms our brokenness and shame
So we may glorify His name. —D. De Haan

Salvation produces a change within that breaks the chains of sin.

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Grace Is Amazing
Ephesians 2:1-10
December 7, 1999

In his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* Philip Yancey says that "the world thirsts for grace in ways it does not even recognize." He writes, "Little wonder the hymn 'Amazing Grace' edged its way onto the Top Ten charts two hundred years after composition."

The hymn's composer John Newton, who was once an infidel and slave trader, had been thirsty for grace. After he discovered the grace of God, he never ceased to be amazed. And people have never ceased singing his song, "Amazing Grace."

But what is grace? Paul summed up its countless virtues by calling them "exceeding riches" (Eph. 2:7). He spelled out some of those riches in Ephesians 2. Grace is: God's favor bestowed on undeserving people (Eph 2:1); God's instrument for bringing salvation to each believer (Eph 2:8); God's provision of spiritual fellowship with others (Eph 2:5, 6); and God's creative influence, equipping the believer to fulfill His purposes (Eph 2:10).

God's grace is not only amazingly rich, it's also free. Yancey points out, "Grace is free only because the giver Himself has borne the cost."

Let's drink deeply of God's amazing grace so that we will be grace-dispensers to a thirsty world. —J E Yoder

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound—
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see. —Newton

God's grace is always sufficient.

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SAVED BY DYING NOT DOING
EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us (Titus 3:5).

A headline in *The Grand Rapids Press* caught my attention: "Conversion to Hindu Faith Is Torturous." The article stated, "A West German businessman has completed his conversion to the Hindu faith by piercing himself through the cheeks with a one-quarter-inch thick, four-foot-long steel rod, and pulling a chariot for two miles by ropes attached to his back and chest by steel hooks... Others walk through twenty-foot-long pits of fire, don shoes with soles made of nails, or hang in the air spread-eagle from hooks embedded in their backs."

What a contrast to the reality of Christianity. The teaching of salvation by grace, through faith, apart from human works, distinguishes Christianity from all other religions of the world. The conversion experience of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is not "completed" through acts of self-torture. We may have to suffer for the cause of Christ, and good works should always prove the genuineness of our faith, but neither suffering nor serving save us. Paul wrote, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Self-inflicted torture is completely foreign to everything the Bible teaches about salvation.

We are not saved on the basis of what we can endure; rather, our hope is in what Christ has already endured for us on the cross. The Christian way is not conversion by torture—it's salvation by grace.—R. W. De Haan

We are saved by God's mercy, not by our merit—
by Christ's dying, not by our doing.

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FREE BUT COSTLY!
EPHESIANS 2:1-10

It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

After hearing the gospel explained, people often say, "You mean there's nothing I can do to deserve it? That's too easy." People object to the idea that God gives unmerited favor so freely to unworthy sinners. Many find it difficult to trust a God who offers salvation as a free gift.

Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan told of a coalminer who came to him and said, "I would give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins, but I cannot believe that He will forgive them if I just ask Him. It is too cheap."

Morgan said, "My dear friend, have you been working today?"

"Yes, I was down in the mine."

"How did you get out of the pit? Did you pay?"

"Of course not. I just got into the cage and was pulled to the top."

"Were you not afraid to entrust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?" Morgan asked.

"Oh, no," said the miner, "it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink the shaft."

Suddenly, the truth struck him. What cost him nothing salvation—had not come cheap to God. This miner had never thought of the great price God paid to send His Son so He could rescue fallen humanity. Now he realized that all anyone had to do was to "get into the cage" by faith.

Because of God's grace, salvation is a free gift. But to receive it, we must stop trying to pay for it and start trusting what Christ has done on the cross. It's free, but it's not cheap. —P. R. Van Gorder

Salvation is free to us, but it cost God an enormous price.

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Adding To A Masterpiece
Ephesians 2:1-10
October 17, 2000

Could you improve on a masterpiece? Imagine that you are walking through the Louvre museum in Paris. As you approach the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, would you think about taking a palette and brushes and touching up the painting? Maybe put some more color in her cheeks? Perhaps change her nose a little?

"That's ridiculous!" you say. For nearly 500 years the Mona Lisa has been considered one of the greatest artistic works of all time. How absurd to think we could add anything to this masterpiece!

Yet that's what many people try to do with Christ's masterpiece—salvation. They think they must improve on it with some work of their own. But that masterpiece was completed when Jesus said, "It is finished," while hanging on the cross (John 19:30). Then He proved that His work of redemption was done when He rose from the dead.

When you hear that Jesus paid the price for your sin and that you don't have to do anything to merit God's grace, do you think it's too good to be true? Do you think there's something you must do to earn it?

You can't add anything! Receive God's gift of salvation. Jesus paid it all. The masterpiece is complete. —J D Branon

Christ's work for my salvation is complete!
No work of mine can add to what He's done;
I bow to worship at the Master's feet,
And honor God the Father's only Son. —Hess

Salvation is a gift to be received—not a goal to be achieved.

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The Person And The Music

Ephesians 2:1-13

August 3, 2000

While traveling on an airplane, I noticed that one of the audio channels featured music from a CD titled "The Buena Vista Social Club." Normally, that wouldn't have grabbed me, but this time I tuned in and enjoyed the selections. A few weeks earlier, I had seen a documentary film that told the story of the featured musicians. Famous in the 1960s, they were all but forgotten, then rediscovered and brought together for this recording, as well as a performance at Carnegie Hall. Because I had learned about them through the film, I became interested in hearing their music.

Have you had a similar experience with Jesus? Before you came to know Him personally, the Bible may have seemed remote and uninteresting. But now it's personal and alive because you know the author as your Savior and friend.

What a change Christ makes in our lives! In Ephesians 2, Paul celebrated this transformation. He began, "You He made alive, who were dead" (Eph 2:1). Now that Christ lives in our hearts, we want to hear His "music" in all of its expressions--through His Word, His creation, and His people.

Today, everywhere we look, we can see the work of Jesus Christ, the creator and conductor of life. Get to know Christ personally, and you will love to hear His music. —David C. McCasland

The name of Jesus is so sweet,
I love its music to repeat,
It makes my joy full and complete,
The precious name of Jesus. --Martin

To appreciate the Master's music, you must know the Master.

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Starting Over

Ephesians 2:1-10

February 15, 2004

The little boy looked up at his mother and asked, "Mama, do you know why God made us?"

Knowing that her son had his own explanation, she asked, "Well, Justin, do you know why?"

"Oh, that's easy. Because the people in the Bible were so bad, He wanted to start over."

When you think about it, it's easy to see how this first-grader could come up with such a conclusion. When he listens to the Bible stories in Sunday school, he hears about Adam and Eve, who messed things up for all of us. He hears about Jonah, who wouldn't obey God and was swallowed by a big fish. He hears about Judas, who betrayed Jesus for 30 silver coins.

The Bible is painfully realistic in its portrayal of people. It is no whitewashed version of the history of God's people. In its honest presentation of its characters, the Bible proves that we all need to be forgiven of our sins. The "bad" people of the Bible remind us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

But there's great news. God did provide a way to "start over." He sent Jesus, who died so that we could become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Trust Jesus and be saved from your sin. Then you will be able to "start over."—Dave Branon

The Savior is waiting to save you,
And cleanse every sin-stain away;

By faith you can know full forgiveness
And be a new creature today! —Bosch

For a new start, ask God for a new heart.

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Amazing Grace

Ephesians 2:1-10

November 27, 2005

In the 1700s, John Newton went to sea with his father on a merchant ship. Soon after his father retired, Newton was pressed into service on a warship. Facing intolerable conditions, he deserted and later requested a transfer to a slave ship that was soon to set sail for Africa.

Newton hardened himself to the trafficking of human beings, and eventually he became captain of his own slave ship. On May 10, 1748, however, his life was changed forever. His ship encountered a terrifying, violent storm. Just as it seemed that the vessel would sink, Newton cried aloud, "Lord, have mercy upon us!"

That night in his cabin, he began to reflect upon God's mercy. Through faith in Christ's sacrifice for him, John Newton experienced God's amazing grace in a personal way. In time, he left the slave trade and entered Christian ministry. Although he became a preacher of the gospel, he is most remembered for his much-loved hymn "Amazing Grace." It's an amazing testimony of his own experience.

God's Spirit convicts us of sin and gives us the power to forsake it. When we receive Christ as our Savior, He does for us what we are powerless to do in our own strength. That's amazing grace. —Dennis Fisher

Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see. —Newton

God claims by grace those who have no claim to grace.

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The Transaction

Ephesians 2:1-10

June 3, 2006

Can more than half of the US adult population be wrong? A survey by the Barna Research Group recently revealed that 54 percent say that people who are generally good and do enough good things for others will earn a place in heaven. That is just one of many methods people suggest as ways to merit entrance into God's eternal kingdom.

Let's think about what has to happen for a person to get to heaven, and why the "good works" idea falls short.

First, we must recognize that we are all born spiritually dead. In Ephesians 2:1, we are taught that we "were dead in trespasses and sins." The spiritual aspect of our existence was dead on arrival when we were physically born into this world. That soul, however, can be made alive. Paul described it like this: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1Corinthians 15:22).

To be made alive, a transaction must take place. Something specific has to happen to turn what was dead into something alive. It is not triggered by good works but happens only when, by faith, you accept God's gift of salvation (2Corinthians 6:2; Ephesians 2:8).

Is your soul alive today? If not, make the transaction and accept God's wonderful gift. —Dave Branon

Choose now, just now; your soul's at stake;
What will your answer be?
'Tis life or death; the choice you make
Is for eternity. —Anon.

Life's biggest decision is what you do with Jesus.

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Get Sure!

Ephesians 2:4-5

March 12, 1998

Church had been a major part of Les Richards' life from his early childhood. As an adult he taught Sunday school. Anyone looking at this friendly, clean-living churchgoer would have labeled Les a Christian in a heartbeat.

After he retired, Les met Ruby. Both of them had been widowed, and they struck up a friendship. One day Ruby said to Les, "I know where I'm going to spend eternity. How about you?"

Although he had attended church for 70 years, Les replied, "I'm not sure." He had always hoped that God would accept him because he did more good deeds than bad, but he knew he couldn't count on that.

When Ruby told Les, "You'd better get sure!" he agreed. Her pastor shared Romans 10:9-10 and Ephesians 2:8-9 with him. Les was surprised to know that he could be sure of his salvation. He prayed and asked Jesus Christ to forgive him and be his Savior. Now Les and Ruby Richards celebrate his salvation every day. Seventy years of good works and church attendance could never get Les into heaven. Only faith in Jesus Christ could.

Are you sure you belong to Him? If not, you can "get sure" today. --J D Branon

How You Can Be Sure

Admit you are a sinner (Ro 3:23).

Believe on Jesus as your Savior (Jn 3:16).

Obey God's commands (1Jn. 5:2).

Trust His promise (1Jn 5:11, 12, 13).

Salvation is not what we achieve but what we receive

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RISEN WITH CHRIST

Ephesians 2:6

F B Meyer - Our Daily Walk

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God."-- Col 3:1 (R.V.).

IF! SOME one will say, "He, there's the rub! I'm afraid that is not true of me; my life is sinful and sorrowful; there are no Easter chimes in my soul, no glad fellowship with the Risen Lord; no victory over dark and hostile powers." But if you are Christ's disciple, you may affirm that you are risen in Him! With Christ you lay in the grave, and with Christ you have gone forth, according to the thought and purpose of God, if not in your feelings and experience. This is distinctly taught in Eph 2:1-10 and Rom. 6. The whole Church (including all who believe in our Lord Jesus) has passed into the light of the Easter dawn; and the one thing for you and me, and all of us, is to begin from this moment to act as if it were a conscious experience, and as we dare to do so we shall have the experience.

Notice how the Apostle insists on this: "You died, you were raised with Christ, your life is hid with Christ. Give yourself time to think about it and realize it."

The Cross of Jesus stands between you and the constant appeal of the world, as when the neighbours of Christian tried to induce him to return to the City of Destruction. This does not mean that we are to be indifferent to all that is fair and lovely in the life which God has given us, but that the Cross is to separate us from all that is selfish, sensual, and savoring of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jn 2:15, 16, 17).

Set your mind on things above (Col 3:2). "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." With many of us there is little attempt to guard our thoughts. The door of our heart stands open, with none to control the ingress or egress of the tumultuous throng of thoughts

that wander in and out. If only we would ask the Holy Spirit to control our thoughts, so that we might think only the things that are true and of good report, a wonderful change would pass over our life (Phil 4:7, 8).

Realize that Christ is your life--He is in you! See to it that nothing hinders the output of His glorious indwelling. Never mind if the world of men misunderstand you. Some day your motives and reasons will be manifested (Col 3:4).

PRAYER - Grant, most gracious God, that we may love and seek Thee always and everywhere, and may at length find Thee and for ever hold Thee fast in the life to come. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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HEAVENLY PEOPLE

Ephesians 2:6

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above (Colossians 3:1).

Christians are a "heavenly" people. That's what Paul meant when he told the Ephesians that God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). We live on earth, but "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). We should therefore "seek those things which are above," and store up treasures in heaven.

We see a graphic difference between an earthly minded person and a heavenly minded person when we look at two Middle Eastern tombs. The first is the burial place of King Tut in Egypt. Inside, precious metal and blue porcelain cover the walls. The mummy of the king is enclosed in a beautifully inscribed, gold-covered sarcophagus. Although King Tut apparently believed in an afterlife, he thought of it in terms of this world's possessions, which he wanted to take with him.

The other tomb, in Palestine, is a simple rock-hewn cave believed by many to be Jesus' burial site. Inside, there is no gold, no earthly treasure, and no body. Jesus had no reason to store up this world's treasures. His goal was to fulfill all righteousness by doing His Father's will. His was a spiritual kingdom of truth and love.

The treasures we store up on earth will all stay behind when this life ends. But the treasures we store up in heaven we'll have for eternity. When we seek to be Christlike in thought, word, and deed, we will live like "heavenly" people. —P. R. Van Gorder

Wise are those who gear their goals to heavenly gains.

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A New Song

August 21, 2004

Ephesians 2:6

I was walking in the park one morning, listening to a tape by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. I had my ancient Walkman clipped to my belt and my headphones clamped over my ears, tuned in to another world. The music was joyous! Oblivious to my surroundings, I began to sing and dance.

Then I spied my neighbor, leaning against a tree with a bemused look on her face. She couldn't hear my music, but she was delighted by my behavior. I wish she could have heard my song.

I thought afterward of the new song God has placed in our hearts, a song we hear from another world. It tells us that God loves us and always will, and that He has "delivered us from the power of darkness" (Colossians 1:13) and "made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). And someday He'll take us to be with Him forever.

In the meantime He has given us eternally useful things to do. Grace now and glory ahead! Is this not a reason to sing?

Next time you're down in the dumps, think about God's goodness. Tune in to the music of heaven and sing a new song with the angels. It may set your feet to dancing and cause great wonderment in those around you. Perhaps they'll want to hear the music too.—David H. Roper

I'll sing with the ransomed a new song on high,
And all because Jesus my Savior is nigh;
The earth with its heartaches is all of the past,
For now I am home with my Savior at last. —Johnson

God's work in our life puts a new song in our heart.

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From Blot to Beauty

August 11, 1994

Ephesians 2:7

God our Maker faced a situation something like that of the artist, except that the problem was immeasurably greater. Adam was God's supreme creation, but he had ruined himself by sin. With his original perfection stained and disfigured, he was fit only to be eternally discarded. But by the amazing strategy of the cross, our gracious God, the Supreme Artist, took ruined sinners and recreated them to reflect the beauty of Christ's holiness.

When we put our faith in the crucified Savior, we are not only completely forgiven, but God's Holy Spirit transforms us, making us into the Creator's prized possession. As the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, we will be displaying throughout eternity "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). --V C Grounds

Dear Lord, take up the tangled strands,
Where we have wrought in vain,
That by the skill of Thy dear hands
Some beauty may remain. --Burroughs

Only God can transform a sin-stained soul into a masterpiece of grace.

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God Ran Him Down

Ephesians 2:8-9

In his book Illustrations of Bible Truth, H. A. Ironside included the story of a new convert who gave his testimony during a church service. With a smile on his face and joy in his heart, the man related how he had been delivered from a life of sin. He gave the Lord all the glory, saying nothing about any of his own merits or what he had done to deserve the blessings of redemption.

The person in charge, who was very legalistic, didn't fully appreciate the reality of salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from human works. So he responded to the young man's comments by saying, "You seem to indicate that God did everything when He saved you. Didn't you do your part before God did His?"

The new Christian jumped to his feet and said, "Oh yes, I did. For more than 30 years I ran away from God as fast as my sins could carry me. That was my part. But God took out after me and ran me down. That was His part." Commenting on this testimony, Ironside wrote, "It was well put and tells a story that every redeemed sinner understands." - R W DeHaan

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For Sinners Only

Ephesians 2:8-9

June 12, 2004

Many non-Christians know the hymn "Amazing Grace" but may not know what grace means. One day when evangelist D. L. Moody was studying the meaning of God's grace, he dashed into the street and shouted to the first man he saw, "Do you know grace?" Mystified, the man replied, "Grace who?" No doubt Moody then explained grace—that God has compassion on sin-sick people and freely offers them forgiveness and new life through faith in Christ.

I heard of a man who had lived a troubled life and died without understanding the message of God's grace. A minister had talked to him and encouraged him to come to church, but his response was, "I'm too undeserving." He didn't know that God's grace is for the undeserving.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he bluntly described their pre-Christian lives as being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). Then he used two hope-filled words: but God (Eph 2:4). They introduce God's mercy and grace that provide forgiveness and new life through Christ. Salvation is through faith, not works, so no one can boast (Eph 2:8, 9).

Let's help others to understand that God's salvation is for sinners only—and that includes all of us. That's what makes God's grace so amazing! —Joanie Yoder

Amazing grace— How sweet the sound—
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see. —Newton

The first step to receiving eternal life is to admit that we don't deserve it.

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You Can't Work For It

Ephesians 2:8-9

August 2, 2002

On Wednesday evenings, the church my family attends becomes a busy place. We give away a truckload of food to people who are struggling to get by. We're grateful to be able to help meet a physical need in their lives. Another important part of this ministry is visiting these folks later and sharing the gospel of Christ with them.

Understandably, we must have some guidelines for a ministry like this, and one of them is: You can't work for this food.

The church has already bought the food, so nothing anyone does can pay for it. The only way a person can get the food is to accept it as a free gift. No one is allowed to unload the food from the truck, pass it out, or do anything else with the intention that such efforts will earn this food. It's absolutely free.

Sound familiar? It should. Jesus bought our souls with His death, and He offers us salvation that is free and paid for (Ro 5:15; 6:23). We can't earn it, no matter what we do (Ephesians 2:8, 9). All we can do is reach out to Jesus by repenting of our sin and receiving His free gift of eternal life.

Have you accepted the salvation Jesus offers? Please do. Reach out and take it. It's free. —J D Branon

The righteousness of Christ
Is free to everyone;
But we must face our guilt,
And trust God's precious Son. —D. De Haan

Our salvation was costly to God, but it's free to us.

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Red Cross

Ephesians 2:8-9

October 11, 1992

During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton was overseeing the work of the Red Cross in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her, wanted to buy food for his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him any. Roosevelt was perplexed. His men needed the help and he was prepared to pay out of his own funds. When he asked someone why he could not buy the supplies, he was told, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood—the provisions were not for sale. All he had to do was simply ask and they would be given freely.

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It's Too Easy

Ephesians 2:8-9

May 31, 2003

I read about an instant cake mix that was a big flop. The instructions said all you had to do was add water and bake. The company couldn't understand why it didn't sell—until their research discovered that the buying public felt uneasy about a mix that required

only water. People thought it was too easy. So the company altered the formula and changed the recipe to call for adding water and an egg to the mix. The idea worked, and sales jumped dramatically.

That story reminds me of how some people react to the plan of salvation. To them it sounds too easy and simple to be true, even though the Bible says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, ... it is the gift of God, not of works" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). They feel that there is something more they must do, something they must add to God's "recipe" for salvation. They think they must perform good works to gain God's favor and earn eternal life. But the Bible is clear—we are saved "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Unlike the cake-mix manufacturer, God has not changed His "formula" to make salvation more marketable. The gospel we proclaim must be free of works, even though it may sound too easy. —Richard De Haan

Salvation is a gift of God,
Not something earned or won;
He freely gives eternal life
To all who trust His Son. —Sper

We are saved by God's mercy, not by our merit—
by Christ's dying, not by our doing.

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Lightning And Thunder

Ephesians 2:8-10

March 11, 2000

When we see lightning flash across the sky, we expect the roar of thunder to follow. If there were no lightning, there would be no thunder because one causes the other.

It's like that with faith. Just as thunder always follows lightning, good works always follow true faith.

The relationship between faith and works is explained in the New Testament writings of Paul to the Ephesians, and in a brief letter from James. At first glance, these authors seem to contradict each other. Paul insisted, "By grace you have been saved through faith, ... not of works" (Eph 2:8, 9). But James declared, "A man is justified [declared righteous] by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

In context, though, we find that James wasn't denying that we are saved by faith, for he referred to Abraham and said that he "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (James 2:23). That was years before Abraham gave evidence of his faith by preparing to offer his son as a sacrifice (James 2:21). Nor was the apostle Paul denying the value of works, for right after stating that we are saved by faith alone he said that we are saved "for good works" (Eph 2:10).

What about you? Has the "lightning" of personal faith in Christ been followed by the "thunder" of good works? —H W Robinson

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Genesis 15:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and Genesis 22:1-14.

Why did God give righteousness to Abraham?

How did Abraham prove his faith?

We are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone.

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Scammed By Spam

Ephesians 2:8-9

April 17, 2003

Have you ever been scammed by spam? Spam is a computer term that refers to junk mail on the Internet. It's a common problem for people who use personal computers. Sometimes it's harmless, but sometimes it's not.

You open your e-mail, and you get a note saying someone wants to help you. Your credit card is invalid, the message says, and

your number has to be reentered to reactivate your account. So, you type it in and hit "send"—thinking you're doing the right thing. Later you get a bill for a bunch of items you didn't buy. You've just been scammed by spam!

What appeared to be helpful is no help at all. You trust the message, do what it says, and you end up losing.

We can also be scammed spiritually. It happens when supposed teachers of the Bible distort the gospel and proclaim a false message that they call the truth (salvation by works, for example). But often it's "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

How can you avoid such a scam? By knowing from the Bible what the true gospel is. Eternal salvation is available only by grace, through trusting in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for our sins (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9). Don't be fooled. Any other message is a scam! —Dave Branon

FOR FURTHER STUDY

For a concise explanation of the gospel, visit these

Web sites: www.rbc.org/faith
or www.discoveryseries.org/q0103.

There's no better news than the gospel—spread the word!

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Making Things Square

Ephesians 2:8-10

March 14, 1998

No one is good enough to deserve heaven. Even our best deeds are tainted by elements of selfishness and vanity. Salvation can come to us only as a gift of God's grace. This is good news, but it offends our pride.

Bill Walker, a character in George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara*, portrays this well. He is angry and drunk when he enters a Salvation Army shelter. He seeks out a young worker there who has introduced his ex-girlfriend to Christ. Bill finds the worker and hits her in the face.

When bystanders taunt him for this cowardly act, Bill becomes remorseful. He attempts to "make things square" by spitting in the eye of a wrestler who is present, hoping the man will strike him. But the wrestler is also a Christian, and he and the girl are willing to forgive Bill. Enraged, he leaves. Pride prevents Bill from accepting forgiveness.

We can no more make things square with God than Bill Walker could atone for hitting that girl. But we don't have to even the score. God freely offers forgiveness and eternal life.

Don't let foolish pride keep you from receiving the greatest of all gifts! Acknowledge your sin and helplessness. Believe what God has said. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. He has already made things square for us. --H V Lugt

For Further Study

What do these verses say about salvation?

Romans 3:28; 6:23; 8:1, 2;
Ephesians 2:8, 9, 10; Titus 3:4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Salvation is free, but it's not yours until you ask for it.

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Our Very Best

Ephesians 2:8, 4-10

May 16, 2005

Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was a lonely and unhappy child, with no siblings or friends. One day he was investigating the backyard of his home and discovered a hole in the fence surrounding the yard. Suddenly a small hand reached out toward him from the other side of the fence. Then just as suddenly the hand was gone. On the ground was a small toy sheep.

Pablo ran inside the house and brought back the best thing he had—a pinecone. He set it down in the same spot and ran off with the sheep. That toy lamb became his most cherished possession.

The exchange brought home to him a profound yet simple fact: To know that you are cared for by someone is one of life's greatest gifts. "This small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside of me," he said, "deep and indestructible."

Reading this story made me think of God's gift to you and me—His hand reaching out to us with His love that sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins. Salvation is the "deep and indestructible" gift of God, received by grace through faith.

What should our response be to our God's infinite love and grace? Let's give Him in return our very best—our heart.—David H. Roper

Oh, help me, Lord, to take by grace divine
Yet more and more of that great love of Thine;
That day by day my heart may give to Thee
A deeper love, and grow more constantly. —Mountain

Jesus gave His all for us; are we giving our all for Him?

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No Fair!

Ephesians 2:8

March 8, 1997

Suppose a non-Christian murders another unbeliever. The victim would go to hell (Ro 6:23; Rev. 20:11, 12, 13, 14, 15). If the killer later receives Christ as his Savior, he would go to heaven. Is that fair?

From a purely human standpoint, we respond, "No, it isn't!" But God's ways are far higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9), and He does not deal with us according to our sins (Ps 103:10).

If God were to execute justice without mercy and grace, we would all be lost. In His mercy He does not give us what we deserve, and by His grace He gives us what we don't deserve. Even though God demands perfection, He doesn't leave us without hope.

God has designed a plan of redemption in which He can both "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Ro 3:26). His perfect standard is satisfied by the perfect sacrifice—His own Son Jesus Christ. The result? "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:1).

No one can rightly accuse God of being unfair. His free offer of salvation is open to everyone. If we do not receive His gift of mercy, we will surely face His judgment. God's grace makes it fair. --R W De Haan

Favor to the undeserving,
Love, when from God we have turned,
Mercy, when His love we've spurned--
That's God's grace! --Anon.

Grace: Getting what we don't deserve.
Mercy: Not getting what we do deserve.

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August 25, 2004

Half-Baked Christians

Ephesians 2:8

The prophet Hosea used the tribe of Ephraim as a poetic representation of the northern kingdom of Israel. In a colorful admonition, he wrote that Ephraim had become "a cake unturned" (Hosea 7:8).

In today's terminology, the prophet might have said that Ephraim was "half-baked." The people were like a pancake burned on one side but raw on the other. Although they took advantage of the Lord's goodness, they did not seek Him with their heart. When they needed help, they turned to other sources (Hosea 7:10, 11, 14, 15, 16). They had become tasteless and useless to God, so He was forced to judge them.

Jesus echoed the words of the prophet. Although He had gentle words for penitent sinners, He gave a scathing rebuke to the haughty and self-righteous who wanted to live as they pleased. He was furious at two-faced religious leaders who talked a good talk but turned around and exploited their followers (Matthew 23:13-30).

God is never soft on sin. He sent His only Son to redeem us from sin's penalty (John 3:16). Let's not be half-baked Christians, claiming God's forgiveness but still living as we please. The only fitting response to God's mercy and grace is to serve Him in humility and love.—Haddon W. Robinson

Thinking It Through

What is the basis of our salvation? (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

How are we to respond to God's grace? (v.10).

How does God correct His children? (Hebrews 12:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).

God's grace is not license to live as we please—it's liberty to please God.

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A Remarkable Life

Ephesians 2:8

October 30, 1998

This is the story of a man with whom I worked. David was a remarkable man. Remarkable in his steady demeanor through 33 years of service with the same ministry. Remarkable in his gentle, caring love for his wife of 30 years. Remarkable in his unwavering dedication to his children--through triumph and trouble. Remarkable in the respect he earned from co-workers and acquaintances. Remarkable in that when he died too suddenly and too soon at age 56, no one had anything bad to say about him. Remarkable!

Yet as friends and family sat in solemn silence at the funeral, David's pastor put his life in perspective. Family members had extolled David's character and comforted everyone with the assurance that he was in heaven. Then the pastor said, "None of the good things David did earned him one second in heaven. He is there because he accepted God's salvation through Christ."

It's true. No matter how remarkable our lives are, we cannot earn heaven. It's a gift.

Examine your life. As religious and well-loved as you may be, you won't go to heaven unless you accept God's gift of eternal life. Ask Jesus Christ to forgive your sins. That will make your life truly remarkable. --J D Branon

The ABCs Of Salvation

Admit you're a sinner (Ro 3:23).

Believe in Christ who died for you (Jn. 3:16).

Confess Him as Savior and Lord (Rom. 10:9, 10).

The most exemplary life is nothing without Christ.

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Grace--The Heart Of The Gospel

Ephesians 2:8

October 31, 1997

What makes Christianity different from all the other religions of the world? Years ago that very question was discussed at a conference. Some of the participants argued that Christianity is unique in teaching that God became man. But someone objected, saying that other religions teach similar doctrines. What about the resurrection? No, it was argued, other faiths believe that the dead rise again. The discussion grew heated.

C. S. Lewis, a strong defender of Christianity, came in late, sat down, and asked, "What's the rumpus about?" When he learned that it was a debate about the uniqueness of Christianity, he immediately commented, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

How right he was! The very heart of the gospel is the supreme truth that God accepts us with no conditions whatever when we put

our trust in the atoning sacrifice of His incarnate Son. Although we are helplessly sinful, God in grace forgives us completely. It's by His infinite grace that we are saved, not by moral character, works of righteousness, commandment-keeping, or churchgoing. When we do nothing else but accept God's total pardon, we receive the guarantee of eternal life (Titus 3:4, 5, 6, 7).

Good news indeed. What a gospel! What a Savior! --V C Grounds

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive? --Johnston

Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything.

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A White Stone

Ephesians 2:8-9

May 11, 2005

Our Lord's message to the church at Pergamum has a curious reference to "a new name" written on "a white stone" (Revelation 2:17). What could this mean?

There are two plausible explanations. In an ancient court of law, when defendants were condemned, they received a black stone with their name on it. If they were acquitted, they received a white stone. Similarly, those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation will receive an acquittal from the judgment of God. What a relief it is to know that our sins are forgiven!

Another explanation comes from the ancient Olympic games. When athletes won, they were awarded a white stone, which was a token of honor.

Together, these illustrations show us the wonderful balance of the Christian life. We are saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Yet obedient Christians often struggle as they seek to serve the One who saved them. One explanation of the white stone is a picture of unearned acquittal. The other shows that we will be rewarded for acts of good works (1 Corinthians 3:13, 14).

Trusting Christ for salvation gives us a new identity. It's like receiving a new name written on a white stone, which shows that we are forgiven—completely.—Dennis Fisher

We're saved by grace through faith alone,
Good works can have no part;
But God rewards each loving deed
That's done with all our heart. —D. De Haan

Jesus removes our sin and rewards our service

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A COMMON MISTAKE

Ephesians 2:8-9

An elderly woman told me that she loves Jesus, prays regularly, reads the Bible daily, and confesses her sins every evening. But she's afraid to die. She's not sure God will accept her. She also said that she was so eager to earn God's favor that she gave a large sum of money to her church without her husband's knowledge. She knew this was wrong, but she said, "I did it for my salvation."

This woman failed to understand Paul's words, "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" (Eph. 2:8, 9). She still believes that she must gain God's approval by her good works.

This is a common mistake among professing Christians. The apostle Paul had to correct some believers in Galatia who had the same idea. They talked about the need to keep many of the regulations of the Old Testament law system. Paul declared that Jesus Christ, by dying on the cross, redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).

Do you believe this? Have you received Christ as your Savior? If so, rest on His finished work on the cross for you, and rejoice and give thanks. Don't make the common mistake of thinking that you can earn His favor. -- Herbert Vander Lugt

It's not works, it's not prayer,
It's not tears that save the soul;
God is now His grace displaying --
Jesus died to make us whole. -- Anon.

Salvation is an unearned blessing
given to an unworthy sinner.

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What's Next?

Ephesians 2:8-9

October 29, 1994

Having just received the Lord Jesus as his Savior from sin, an enthusiastic young boy blurted out, "Now what do I do? What's next?" He had the right idea! Although nothing further had to be done to receive salvation, there was much more to do to serve God.

The Bible, in Ephesians 2:8-9, makes it crystal-clear that we are saved by grace through faith. We could never do anything to deserve salvation. The best we have to offer is not good enough to meet the Lord's holy standards. We experience forgiveness of sin, find peace with God, have the promise of heaven, and become possessors of everlasting life by trusting the Lord Jesus and Him alone. It is impossible for anyone to earn these favors!

Following conversion, however, we should respond as that young boy and the apostle Paul did, "Now what do I do? What's next?" Immediately after stating that we are not saved by works, Ephesians 2 tells us, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

First there's faith, then comes service. We believe to become Christians. We serve because we have been saved. That's what's next! --R W De Haan

Oh, what can I give to the Master,
The One who from sin set me free?
I'll give Him a lifetime of service
To thank Him for dying for me. --K. De Haan

We cannot work for salvation, but salvation is followed by works

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Ephesians 2:10

F B Meyer

We are his workmanship

The Greek word might be literally rendered his poem. As the meter varies in the poems of a laureate, so does the course of one life differ from another; but God has a thought, a plan, a purpose for each. This lyric, that heroic, another dramatic.

Created for good works. — How carefully the apostle defines the true position of works in the divine life. In the foregoing verses he insists that we are not saved by our works, that none should boast; but, as though to meet the objection that his system was inconsistent with holy living, he affirms that the whole intention of God was that we should manifest our new life in Christ by the holy life in which it fruits. We were created in Him unto good works. Whatever good works may be demanded of you, dare to believe that you were created in Christ Jesus to do them. There is a perfect adjustment between the two.

The good works prepared. — Our new creation in Christ Jesus and the preparation of our life-work are due to the same mind. God who made us has prepared our path for us. It may lie up hill or down dale; may be lined with grassy sward or be full of jagged stones; may be short with the years of childhood or long with those of old age; may consist in lying on a couch to suffer or in strenuous activity — but every yard has been prepared.

Our daily walk. — We have not to cut or make our path; but simply to follow it, one step at a time. And when the heart or flesh fails, when the way seems too difficult, or the door too strait — we must look always unto Jesus, who has gone along the same track, asking that his righteousness may go before us, and set us in the way of his steps (Psalm 85:13. r.v.).

(Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

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GENUINE FAITH

Ephesians 2:10

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20).

In nature, lightning and thunder present a striking illustration of the relationship between faith and works. When lightning flashes across the sky, we know that the roar of thunder will follow. Without lightning, there would be no thunder, because the one is the cause of the other. Likewise, good works always accompany saving faith, because one causes the other.

We must keep before us the clear truth that we are saved by grace and grace alone. Ephesians 2:8, 9 says,

"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."

But many believers who glibly quote this passage ignore the verse that follows: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

In the same manner that thunder contributes nothing to lightning, good works add nothing to our salvation. Rather, they are the "sound" of faith and will follow every genuine conversion experience. The one without the other is not the real thing.

Genuine faith is always evident by what follows—a life of good works. —R. W. De Haan

Faith without works is presumptuous;
faith with works is precious.

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We Have Work To Do

Ephesians 2:10

May 11, 2001

When you love someone deeply, you long to share in a common purpose. In a similar way, your heavenly Father loves you and yearns for your willing participation in His glorious purposes. Of course, no one is indispensable to God, but His destiny for each of our lives cannot be fulfilled without our active cooperation.

We are sometimes reluctant to emphasize this fact. We freely quote Ephesians 2:8-9, "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." But not wishing to sound contradictory nor to appear boastful, we stop there and avoid verse 10 about "good works." Yet Paul's meaning is clear—although we're not saved by good works, we are saved for good works.

Mysterious as it is, God has planned our good works in advance, so that as we fulfill them "we are God's fellow workers" (1Corinthians 3:9). The great maker of the Stradivarius violin rightly said of God: "He could not make Antonio Stradivari violins without Antonio."

God has chosen to bless others uniquely through you, and you can do what no one else can do. But when He does use you, be careful to give Him all the glory. —J E Yoder

When we are partners with the Lord,
Our work is not in vain;
Eternal blessings will abound—
His good will be our gain. —Sper

Faith never stands around with its hands in its pockets.

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Crucible Steel
Ephesians 2:10
May 18, 1999

Frank has a toolbox full of knives and chisels that are designed for his woodcarving hobby. His favorite is a German-made, all-purpose carving knife. He has honed it repeatedly, and it still holds an edge. "I'm going to be sad," Frank said, looking fondly at his knife, "when this blade gets too thin to sharpen."

Like all reliable carving tools, that knife is constructed of "crucible steel." To produce this durable metal, raw material is placed in a crucible where it is subjected to intense heat. Once it is glowing with molten brightness, the white-hot metal is maintained at precisely the right temperature until it qualifies as crucible steel. When it cools, it is neither so soft that it won't hold an edge nor so hard that it is brittle.

Christians, as the handiwork of God, are shaped and formed by His will. Sometimes He places us in a crucible of affliction. Peter wrote about the faith of Christians and said that it may be "tested by fire" (1 Pet. 1:7). That testing may come in the form of "various trials" to refine our faith (1Pe 1:6).

If you're in a crucible of testing right now, don't be discouraged. God knows what He is doing. He has promised to stay with you and help you to become a useful tool in His strong, loving hands. --D C Egner

All things work out for good we know--
Such is God's great design;
He orders all our steps below
For purposes divine. --Peterson
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Gold is tested by fire; man is tested by adversity.

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Home Improvement
Ephesians 2:10
August 12, 1998

If you've ever wanted to live in a castle, this is your chance. The state of Saxony in eastern Germany has a dozen castles for sale, each priced at one German mark (which is just over half a US dollar).

There is a catch, however. According to a New York Times article, the historic structures are in advanced stages of disrepair, and buyers must restore each property "consistent with its historical architecture." Estimates for restoration run from \$7 million to \$60 million per castle.

It has occurred to me that buying a fixer-upper's nightmare gives us a picture of what God has done for each of us in Jesus. Ephesians 2:1 bluntly states our condition without Christ--"dead in trespasses and sins." But the hopelessness of the human condition never deters God's love.

The renovation and renewal the Father carries out in all who receive His Son begins with new life. "But God, ... even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4, 5). And what God purchased at the great cost of His only Son, He gives to us freely (Eph 2:5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

Like derelict castles restored far beyond their former glory, our transformed lives point others to God, who is rich in mercy, grace, and love. --D C McCasland

Putting It Into Practice
Colossians 3:1 tells us we were "raised with Christ."

Because of that, what are some of the practical instructions we are given on how to live? (Col 3:5-17).

When we receive Christ, God's work isn't over--it has just begun.

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Saved--To Be Good

Ephesians 2:10

October 26, 1997

Many people assume that we qualify for heaven by doing good deeds. This fallacy is illustrated by a comment made after the death of a man who had been held in high esteem. A friend said, "If anyone goes to heaven, he'll certainly be there, for he was such a good man!"

According to the apostle Paul, however, salvation is based on God's gift of grace and not on good works that anyone can boast about (Eph. 2:8, 9). So where, then, do works belong? In the next verse, Paul described believers as "created in Christ Jesus for good works [not by good works], which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

If we're not straight on this matter, we'll make the mistake of trying to earn our way into heaven, which the Bible says no one can do (Ro 3:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). How does grace deal with this problem? An elderly man on his deathbed said it well: "I have just taken all my good works and all my bad works and thrown them right overboard, and I am going to heaven on the basis of free grace."

The only safe and sure foundation for both life and death is God's free gift of grace. That's not cheap grace, however, for remember that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin. We are saved for good works. --J E Yoder

Naught have I gotten but what I received,
Grace has bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase--
I'm only a sinner saved by grace! --Gray

We are not saved by good works but for good works.

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God's Song

Ephesians 2:10

A church organist was practicing a piece by Felix Mendelssohn and not doing too well. Frustrated, he gathered up his music and started to leave. He had not noticed a stranger come in and sit in a rear pew.

As the organist turned to go, the stranger came forward and asked if he could play the piece. "I never let anyone touch this organ!" came the blunt reply. Finally, after two more polite requests, the grumpy musician reluctantly gave him permission.

The stranger sat down and filled the sanctuary with beautiful, flawless music. When he finished, the organist asked, "Who are you?" The man replied, "I am Felix Mendelssohn." The organist had almost prevented the song's creator from playing his own music!

There are times when we too try to play the chords of our lives and prevent our Creator from making beautiful music. Like that stubborn organist, we only reluctantly take our hands off the keys. As His people, we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand" (Ephesians 2:10). But our lives won't produce beautiful music unless we let Him work through us.

God has a symphony written for our lives. Let's allow Him to have His way in us. —David C. Egner

Once we stop our own devising,
Quit the schemes of our own choosing,
Cease from all our fruitless striving,
God steps in with grace and power! —D. De Haan

God's ability is not limited by our inability.

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Raku
Ephesians 2:10
January 13, 2005

Some friends gave us a piece of Raku pottery. "Each pot is hand-formed," the tag explained, "a process that allows the spirit of the artist to speak through the finished work with particular directness and intimacy."

Once the clay has been shaped by the potter it is fired in a kiln. Then, glowing red hot, it is thrust into a smoldering sawdust pile where it remains until finished. The result is a unique product—"one of a kind," the tag on our piece insists.

So it is with us. We bear the imprint of the Potter's hand. He too has spoken through His work "with particular directness and intimacy." Each of us is formed in a unique way for a unique work: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

But though we are created for good works, we're not yet finished. We must experience the kiln of affliction. Aching hearts, weary spirits, aging bodies are the processes God uses to finish the work He has begun.

Don't fear the furnace that surrounds you. Be "patient in tribulation" and await the finished product. "Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4).—David H. Roper

We are here to be perfected,
Only God our needs can see;
Rarest gems bear hardest grinding,
God's own workmanship are we. —Anon.

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. —Philippians 1:6

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Just A Glimpse
Ephesians 2:14-18
April 25, 2003

Travelers who drive across the flat landscape of Groom, Texas, are surprised by an unexpected sight. Looming up against the sky is a cross 190 feet high. That giant symbol of the Christian faith was erected by Steve Thomas in the prayerful hope that the thoughts of anyone who sees it might be turned to Jesus. When his handiwork was finished and dedicated, he said, "We want some converts out of this."

All Christians are grateful when a nonbeliever's attention is drawn to Jesus Christ and the cross. The awareness may be fleeting, but who can predict what even a split-second reaction may mean to an immortal soul? Suddenly a sinful person may begin to wonder why Jesus died on the cross. This may prompt him to seek answers from the Bible or from Christians he may know.

What about us as Christians? As we hurry along through life's often dreary landscape, are we grateful for any reminder of our Father's love that sent His Son to die? Through the cross, Jesus has reconciled us to God and given us His peace (Ephesians 2:14,16). Take some time today to reflect on the meaning of the cross, and let it flood your heart with praise to the Savior. —Vernon C Grounds

Once from the realms of infinite glory,
Down to the depths of our ruin and loss,
Jesus came, seeking—O Love's sweet story—
Came to the manger, the shame, and the cross. —Strickland

To know the meaning of the cross, you must know the One who died there.

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The Peace Initiative
Ephesians 2:11-18
December 24, 1994

It was the night before Christmas in 1870. French and German armies faced each other on the field of battle in the Franco-Prussian War. A French soldier started walking toward the German lines. His comrades watched breathlessly, expecting to hear at any instant the crack of a rifle that would end his life. As he neared the enemy lines, he stopped and began singing, "Noel, noel! Noel, noel! Born is the King of Israel!" No shot rang out.

Slowly the Frenchman returned to his ranks. There was silence! Then from the German side came a lone soldier to that same spot and sang the German version of the same song. After each stanza both armies united in the chorus. For a few minutes Christ brought peace to that battlefield.

God is a peacemaker who always takes the first step. Jesus came as a baby, and when He grew to manhood He preached peace to a warring world. Then, in the greatest peace initiative this world has ever seen, Christ made peace between God and man by dying for our sins (Col. 1:20).

Peacemaking efforts may be rejected, but the alternative is continued hostility. God didn't settle for that, nor should we. Let's take the first step in healing a broken relationship, even at the risk of being "shot down." --D J De Haan

O Prince of Peace, keep us, we pray,
From strife and enmity;
Help us to speak with loving words
That quell hostility. --JDB

What this world needs is
the peace that passes all misunderstanding.

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Sin Of The Skin

Ephesians 2:11-22

January 18, 1999

Most people hate to be accused of racism. But racial bias is all too prevalent. Even Christians have had a long history of ethnic prejudice. In the first century, Jewish believers were reluctant to accept their Gentile brothers. In recent years, racial discrimination has been a dominant issue.

Prejudice can run so deep that it sometimes takes a tragedy to make a person see how wrong it is to discriminate on the basis of physical differences. Several years ago I read about a bigoted truckdriver who had no use for African-Americans. But one early morning, his tanker truck flipped over and burst into flames. A week later, he was lying in a hospital bed and looking into the face of a black man who had saved his life. He learned that the man had used his own coat and bare hands to smother the flames that had turned the trucker into a human torch. He wept as he thanked the man for his act of unselfish heroism.

We shouldn't need a tragedy to open our eyes. We need only look to Calvary. There our Lord gave His life for people of every language, race, and nation. The universal scope of His sacrifice shows His love for every human being.

Have mercy on us, Lord, if we have fanned the fire of prejudice that You died to put out. --M R De Haan II

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,
Whate'er your race may be;
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me. --Oxenham

Prejudice is a lazy man's substitute for thinking.

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Hadrian's Wall

Ephesians 2:11-18

September 29, 2006

When Julius Caesar invaded the south coast of Britain in 55 BC, he met resistance from warring Celtic tribes. But a century later,

Roman control had extended all the way north into what is now Scotland.

The conquest took 30,000 Celtic lives, but the Roman victory was short-lived. Surviving clansmen soon began a fierce guerrilla campaign against their occupiers. So in AD 122, Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall constructed to separate the Romans from the barbarians to the north. Hadrian's Wall stands to this day.

In Jesus' day, a barrier stronger than Hadrian's Wall stood between God's people and the Gentiles who were outside their spiritual community. It was the barrier of ethnic prejudice. God's design was to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (Ge 12:1, 2, 3; Is 51:2). But instead of being a witness to the nations, Israel nurtured prejudice against the Gentiles.

Prejudice and racism remain with us today, even in the church. Such attitudes do damage to our witness of Christ's love for all people. Jesus laid down His life to redeem people from every tribe and nation. We must not only accept them, we must love them as our brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal. 3:28-29; Rev. 5:9). —Dennis Fisher

Thinking It Over

Are you willing to take the first step to understand
fellow believers who are different from you?
How can you befriend believers from other cultures?

Christ's love creates unity out of diversity.

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The War Is Over!

Ephesians 2:17

November 7, 2004

The bitter conflict had finally ended between the North and the South. The soldiers of the US Civil War were free to return to their families. But a number of them remained hidden in the woods, living on berries. They either didn't hear or didn't believe that the war was over, so they continued enduring miserable conditions when they could have been back home.

It's something like that in the spiritual realm too. Christ made peace between God and man by dying in our place. He paid sin's penalty on the cross. Anyone who accepts His sacrifice will be forgiven by a holy God.

Sadly, many people refuse to believe the gospel and continue to live as spiritual fugitives. Sometimes even those who have placed their trust in Christ live on almost the same level. Either out of ignorance or unwillingness, they fail to claim the promises of God's Word. They do not experience the joy and assurance that should accompany salvation. They do not draw from their relationship with God the comfort and peace He intends for His children. They are the objects of His love, care, and provision but live as if they were orphans.

Have you been living apart from the comfort, love, and care of your heavenly Father? Come on home. The war is over! —Richard De Haan

We fail, O Lord, to realize
The fullness of what You have done,
So help us trust Your saving work
And claim the triumph You have won. —D. De Haan

Christ's victory over death means peace for His saints

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Ephesians 2:19

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

What is meant by our being citizens in heaven? It means that we are under heaven's government. Christ the king of heaven reigns in our hearts; our daily prayer is, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The proclamations issued from the throne of glory are freely received by us: the decrees of the Great King we cheerfully obey. Then as citizens of the New Jerusalem, we share heaven's honours. The glory which belongs to beatified saints belongs to us, for we are already sons of God, already princes of the blood imperial; already we wear the spotless robe of Jesus' righteousness; already we have angels for our servitors, saints for our companions, Christ for our Brother, God for our Father, and a crown of immortality for our reward. We share the honours of

citizenship, for we have come to the general assembly and Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven. As citizens, we have common rights to all the property of heaven. Ours are its gates of pearl and walls of chrysolite; ours the azure light of the city that needs no candle nor light of the sun; ours the river of the water of life, and the twelve manner of fruits which grow on the trees planted on the banks thereof; there is nought in heaven that belongeth not to us. "Things present, or things to come," all are ours. Also as citizens of heaven we enjoy its delights. Do they there rejoice over sinners that repent—prodigals that have returned? So do we. Do they chant the glories of triumphant grace? We do the same. Do they cast their crowns at Jesus' feet? Such honours as we have we cast there too. Are they charmed with his smile? It is not less sweet to us who dwell below. Do they look forward, waiting for his second advent? We also look and long for his appearing. If, then, we are thus citizens of heaven, let our walk and actions be consistent with our high dignity.

Part Of The Family

Ephesians 2:19

August 24, 1997

Every few years my family holds a reunion at a park near Lake Michigan. We don't see one another very often, so we're always amazed at how much the grandchildren have grown or how much the children look like their parents. I look forward to the picnic because I'm reminded that I'm part of a family.

Everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior belongs to God's family. The apostle Paul said that we are all "members of the household of God" (Ep 2:19). We are part of a family that is made up of all believers in Christ.

Members of a loving family should be honest about their concerns for one another. They can ask about how specific problems or struggles are being handled, and they can confront difficult issues.

As believers in Christ, we are to be concerned about other members in the family of God. Sometimes the path to spiritual growth can get pretty rough. So we need to encourage fellow Christians to turn from their sin and live for the Lord. The purpose is always to produce a harmonious family of believers who are doing the work of God and building one another up.

What a privilege to be a part of the family of God! --D C Egner

For Further Study

How can members of God's family help one another?

See Romans 12:10,16; Galatians 5:13,26;

Ephesians 4:1, 2, 3,32; Hebrews 10:24, 25; James 5:16.

We show our love for God when we love His family.

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Family Tie

Ephesians 2:21

July 19, 2004

An elderly man who visited an art gallery was deeply moved by a painting that portrayed Christ on the cross. It was so realistic in depicting the suffering of the Savior that his heart was filled with gratitude for the great price the Lord Jesus paid for his redemption. With tears trickling down his cheeks, he exclaimed, "Bless Him! I love Him! I love Him!"

Other visitors standing nearby wondered what the man was talking about. One person walked over and looked at the painting. Soon he too felt deep emotion welling up in his heart. Turning to the old man, he gave him a firm handshake and said, "So do I! I love Him too!" The scene was repeated as a third man and then a fourth walked over, gazed at the painting, and exclaimed, "I love Him too!" Although these men were from different churches, they felt a common bond because of their faith in Christ.

As believers, we need an awareness of our spiritual unity with other Christians. We need to focus on the fundamentals on which we agree—such as our love for the Savior who died for us—rather than bicker about lesser issues.

Regardless of sincere disagreements, we as blood-bought believers should recognize that we have a strong family tie in Christ.—Richard De Haan

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above. —Fawcett

As we draw near to Christ we are drawn near to each other.

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Built To Last

Ephesians 2:22

February 23, 2006

When explorers entered Peru, they found huge, impressive buildings that may have been standing for 2,000 years. These ancient Inca structures were built of hand-hewn rocks of different sizes and shapes. Some were 3-sided, some 4-sided, and some 7-sided. Without the use of mortar, they were fitted together so perfectly that they stood for many centuries, even through earthquakes.

God builds His church in much the same way. The Bible pictures the church of Jesus Christ as a building, and each believer is a block in that building. Peter said that we, "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul said that we are "being joined together" (Ephesians 2:21) and "are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22).

People with a variety of backgrounds, abilities, interests, and needs make up Christ's church, so uniting in a common purpose is not an easy process. Yet when we let the Lord do His work among us, shaping us and assigning our place in the structure, we become part of a strong, solid edifice.

Yes, we are all different. But God is building an enduring church. The magnificent Inca buildings will eventually crumble, but the church is built to last. —David C. Egener

Christ builds His church with different stones
And makes each one secure;
All shapes and sizes fit in place
To make His church endure. —Anon.

The permanence of the church is based on the character of the Builder.