

Ephesians 2:1-10

Week 3 - By Grace, Through Faith: God's Work of Salvation

Learning Objectives

- Understand our former life of sin
- See God's great love, mercy and kindness in saving us
- Discuss what it means to be saved to walk in good works

Leaders' Note: This passage is more about God's work of salvation than it is about our response. That may be challenging for those who are first encountering God's sovereignty and it might be helpful to point out God's mercy and grace to us before we consider our response. Reading the passage this way lends clarity to questions on how faith and good works play out together in His great plan of salvation. This helps us to see ourselves in the story more clearly and results in us praising God for His glorious grace. Once we've understood God's mercy to us, we can think about what it means to "walk in good works" as those who have been brought from death to life.

Introduction

Pray for your time together as a group!

? What was the best gift you've ever received? How did you respond?

Optional Introduction: In Ephesians 1, Paul thanks God for His eternal plan of salvation. By faith in Christ, all believers find redemption and forgiveness through his blood, obtain an inheritance, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul then prays that his readers would have further revelation of God's glory, resulting in hope and the knowledge of God's resurrection power in Christ, the same power that lives in believers. Now, we will explore who we were before Christ and who we are now in Christ.

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Key Terms

***Flesh:** the nature of humanity apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God

****Wrath:** under the sentence of divine punishment for rebellion/opposition to God

***Mercy:** Pity, compassion, covenant-loyalty, covenant-love, kindness & help to the undeserving

****Grace:** unmerited favor, kindness

***Handiwork:** that which has been made, of the works of God as creator

***Transgression:** a lapse or deviation from truth or uprightness; a sin, misdeed

**Definitions adapted from BibleWebApp.com*

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Optional Note: It is important to remember the ‘bad news’ of who we were without Christ before we get to the good news. Even though we may be physically alive, this passage refers to our spiritual state of deadness. In this section, the goal is to set up a stark contrast between being dead and being made alive. As leaders, perhaps take some time to sit and dwell in the bad news before moving on.

Questions for Discussion: Spiritual Deadness (Ephesians 2:1-3)

? Who were we according to this passage?

Possible answers: dead in transgressions and sins; living in sin; following the ways of this world; followed the ruler of the kingdom of the air; disobedient; gratified the cravings of our flesh, followed its desires and thoughts; by nature, deserving of wrath

? What do you think about when you hear Paul describe “spiritual deadness” (dead in sins, walking in the ways of the world, following the prince of the power of the air)?

Possible answers: fulfilling our own desires and lusts, no hope, no joy, rebellious

? How do you react to this news of being ‘by nature, deserving of wrath’?

Possible answers: That sounds hopeless. It sounds pretty harsh. How can we get away from wrath? How can God be good and loving and still wrathful?

? How do we still struggle with our earthly nature, or ‘passions of our flesh’?

Answers may vary

Questions for Discussion: God’s Mercy (Ephesians 2:4-9)

? What has God done for us according to this passage and why?

Possible Answer: because He is rich in mercy and great love, He took us out of that life of sin and raised us up with Christ, seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms

? What strikes you about the difference between these verses and verses 1-3?

Possible Answer: There doesn't seem to be any good news in v1-3. They're all about our nature as humans. These verses are all good news and they are all about God, not about us! We couldn't have any of the good news without God.

? When have you experienced God's kindness?

Possible Answer: Providing for my needs, giving me a community, family, friends, loved ones who care about me.

? Why does this matter? How do you respond when you hear this news?

Possible Answer: My salvation is only because he is merciful. The only reason I can be saved is because God is good. I can't do enough good in the world, no matter how hard I try, to earn salvation. I feel thankful to God that He sent His Son!

? Who are we now according to this passage?

Possible Answer: seated with Christ, people who have been saved by grace, faithful, experience kindness instead of wrath, boast in God, His handiwork

The Greek word for "handiwork" here in the passage is poiéma, which means a work of God and is similar to our word, poem. It refers to the work of God as Creator. It is also used in Romans 1:20, where Paul speaks of God as clearly displaying His glory in the "things that have been made." In this context, we are new people, God's own workmanship in Christ, called to clearly display His glory by walking in the good works He has prepared for us to do beforehand.
-Strong's Concordance, 4161

Questions for Discussion: Walking in Good Works (Ephesians 2:10)

Leaders' note: God has done all of this for me: now what? Since God calls us all to unique places and gives us unique gifts to use to bless others, this is a great opportunity to help your group think practically about walking in good works in their daily lives and spheres of influence. We want to apply this passage to spur us onward to love and good deeds.

? What are we saved to do according to this passage?

Possible Answer: good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do

? How are we called to show the mercy of God to others?

Possible Answer: Luke 6:36 says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" and in that passage Jesus is specifically referring to forgiving our enemies. We see in this passage that we were completely undeserving of God's grace, but because of his great love for us we have received mercy, being pulled from a life of sin without Christ, to a life of good works, seated with Christ already in the heavenly places.

? In what ways can we use the gifts and strengths has God blessed us with in order to bless others?

Answers may vary

For Discussion and Accountability

? What ways are you feeling called to respond to God's great mercy?

? What is one practical way that you can 'walk in good works' in your spheres of influence this week?