

STUDY & EXEGESIS

EPHESIANS 2:1-10 (KJV) · AUGUST 26, 2026

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ephesians 2:1–10 is a foundational New Testament passage contrasting the spiritual condition of humanity outside of Christ with the transformative work of divine grace. Writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul traces the trajectory of redemption: from total spiritual death under sin to spiritual resurrection and union with Jesus Christ. The passage centers on God’s sovereign initiative in salvation, presenting good works not as the cause of redemption, but as its pre-ordained fruit.

VERSE-BY-VERSE NOTES

VERSES 1–3

- 1

"AND you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;"
- 2

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:"
- 3

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

Paul opens by describing the state of humanity apart from God. The word "quicken" means "made alive." Before God acts, human beings are not merely sick or morally weak, but spiritually "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). In this state of spiritual death, human behavior is governed by three opposing forces:

- The World:** Walking "according to the course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2), conforming to fallen societal norms.
- The Devil:** Following "the prince of the power of the air," the evil spirit operating in "the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).
- The Flesh:** Driven by internal fallen desires, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3).

The term "conversation" in verse 3 translates the Greek word *anastrophe*, referring to one's conduct or manner of life. Paul includes both Gentile believers ("ye," v. 1–2) and Jewish believers ("we all," v. 3) in this description, emphasizing that all humanity by nature shares the same condition: being "children of wrath" subject to divine judgment.

VERSES 4–7

4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,"

5 "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"

6 "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"

7 "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Verse 4 introduces a vital shift in the text: "But God." Salvation begins entirely with God's character—His abundant mercy and great love—rather than human merit.

Paul stresses that this divine action occurred "even when we were dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5), highlighting that spiritual life is given to those incapable of earning it. Through union with Christ, three simultaneous works of God occur:

- Believers are **made alive** ("quickened us together with Christ," v. 5).
- Believers are **resurrected** ("raised us up together," v. 6).
- Believers are **exalted** ("made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," v. 6).

The ultimate goal of this redemptive act extends into eternity: "that in the ages to come" God might display the supreme riches of His grace and kindness through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:7).

VERSES 8–10

8 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:"

9 "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

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

Verses 8 and 9 formulate the core mechanism of salvation. Deliverance from sin is initiated "by grace" (unmerited favor) and received "through faith" as the instrument. Paul emphasizes that the entire deliverance—including the faith to believe—is "not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Human effort ("works") is completely excluded from the ground of salvation to prevent human self-glorying or boasting (Ephesians 2:9).

In verse 10, Paul explains the proper relationship between salvation and Christian living. Believers are God's "workmanship" (Greek *poiema*, a crafted creation or masterpiece), created anew in Christ. Good works are not the baseline requirement to achieve salvation; rather, they are the intended outcome. God has "before ordained" (prepared beforehand in His sovereign decree) specific good works for redeemed believers to walk in.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

- **Ephesus and the Greco-Roman Atmosphere:** Ephesus was a major urban center in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), known for the Great Temple of Artemis (Diana) and widespread practice of magic and astrology. The phrase "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) reflects an ancient worldview in which spiritual powers were believed to occupy the atmospheric realms between heaven and earth. Paul asserts Christ's absolute authority over these demonic powers.
 - **Honor and Boasting:** First-century Greco-Roman culture relied heavily on patronage, civic benefaction, and personal boasting regarding one's achievements, family lineage, and public works. By declaring that salvation is entirely "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9), Paul directly challenges the honor-seeking values of ancient society.
 - **Jew and Gentile Dynamics:** Early Christian communities faced tension between Jewish and Gentile believers. In verses 1–3, Paul carefully establishes that both groups were equally spiritual dead and under wrath before receiving grace, laying the ground for the unity of the church explained later in the chapter.
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WHERE TRADITIONS DIFFER

Theological traditions interpret specific aspects of this passage differently based on their understandings of divine grace, human free will, and salvation:

- **Monergism vs. Synergism in Regeneration (vv. 1–5, 8–9):**
 - *Reformed View:* Teaches that human beings are spiritually dead (*total depravity*) and utterly incapable of initiating faith on their own. Regeneration is *monergistic* (God acts alone to give spiritual life), and both grace and faith itself are unconditional gifts from God (Ephesians 2:8).
 - *Arminian / Wesleyan View:* Agrees that humanity cannot save itself, but holds that God extends *prevenient grace* to all people. This grace frees the human will, allowing individuals to either accept or reject God's gift of faith. Faith is seen as the human condition for receiving salvation, rather than a direct gift unconditionally bestowed.
 - *Roman Catholic View:* Understands salvation as a process wherein initial grace is given without prior merit, but the individual must actively cooperate (*synergism*) with infused grace through faith and good works to attain final justification.
- **The Scope of "the gift of God" (v. 8):**
 - Reformed commentators generally view "the gift" as referring syntactically to the whole package of salvation presented in the clause, including faith itself.
 - Other traditions argue that "the gift" refers specifically to the gift of salvation or grace, maintaining that faith is the human response to that gift.