

# Ephesians 2:1-10

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Date: 17 June 2007

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Bible uses lots of different pictures to describe the state of people as they naturally are, and then the difference that takes place when they become Christians.

Sometimes it talks of a crisis as drastic as being born physically, and says that we have to be born spiritually as well if we want to experience spiritual life.

Or at other times it talks about conversion, and the word conveys the picture of a person marching in a certain direction, and then stopping and doing a complete turnaround and going back a different way.

Or again, it may talk of people who are living in darkness, and then receive illumination which alters their lives. Sometimes the picture is one of sleep, from which people are awakened by the call of Christ.

And you'll find these two pictures of the darkness and the sleep brought together sometimes, because people who sleep generally do so in the darkness of night. You'll find that later in the letters of the Ephesians, which we're looking at this morning.

[ 1 : 12 ] But here in the chapter that we've just been reading, in chapter 2, we've got the most far-reaching picture of them all. The picture of dead people brought back to life.

And it's worth our while exploring this way of looking at it, with the aid of the first half of this chapter, chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. The main thought in the section is that God has brought us back to life. But that's not expressed until we get to verse 5. What has happened is that Paul has inverted the normal order of a sentence that we've learned as subject, and then the verb, and then the object. But sometimes we change the order back to front, and put the object first. So Paul wanted to say something like, You, he made alive.

So he starts with the you in verse 1, but then he begins to describe the situation of the people whom God is raising to life. And once he's begun to do this, he finds himself going on and adding so much detail to it, that he loses the thread of a sentence.

[ 2 : 28 ] And so he has to begin again in verse 4 and verse 5, But God made us alive with Christ. He's switched from you, meaning the readers, to we, meaning all of us who have had this great experience.

So the NIV, which is, I think, the version most of us have in front of us, starts off by saying, As for you, and that's anticipating the object of the verb in verse 5.

If you're using one of the older versions, like King James, the authorised version, then in verse 1 it anticipates, and it starts off the chapter by saying, And you, hath he quickened?

But it puts the words, hath he quickened, in italics, so that you know they're not really there in what Paul actually said. And you've got the problem there, that the raising up takes place before we know who's being raised up.

So Paul describes the situation first. He tells us about the ailment, before he tells us what the cure is. The authorised version, as I say, gets it back to front a little bit.

[ 3 : 36 ] So in the chapter, verses 1 to 3, describe our situation before we are brought back to life. Verses 4 to 6 give us the main thought that this is what God has done to us.

Verse 7 then tells us the purpose why God did it. And then verses 8 to 10 are a sort of explanation of the purpose that God had.

That's the rough structure of what we'll be looking at. So we start our study by looking at what Paul has to say about our situation. And as I said, this is described in terms of being dead.

Physical death is a familiar concept to us. It means most simply the cessation of life or the absence of life. That's how it would have seemed to ancient people.

They didn't have all the problems of understanding exactly when a person dies that are raised by modern Benson. When is a person really dead? Is it through irreversible brain damage?  
[ 4 : 39 ] Is it through their heart stopping? Or what is it? Their idea of death was a simple negative one. The absence of life. The absence of response to stimuli. The absence of movement.

So obviously when Paul speaks about people here being dead, he's not thinking of physical death. True though it is that all of us must eventually die physically.

He must be speaking metaphorically. But even to use the term dead metaphorically may seem to be a strange way of describing the ordinary people of this world.

And indeed the very next verse, verse 2, suggests that in some way they were alive despite being dead. For it goes on to talk about things that they did in their former life.

It was a way of life which had various characteristics. And it's simplest to explain it by saying that they did respond to certain stimuli but they didn't respond to others.

[ 5 : 42 ] What they didn't respond to was the voice of God. telling them his will. The conscience we were thinking about a few moments ago. They didn't hear what God was saying and consequently they didn't act.

Or they'd listen so often to God's voice and disobeyed it that they ceased to hear it when God was speaking to them. In the way in which we can shut out background noises that are quite loud but we learn to shut off our hearing of them when we're doing other things.

But they did respond to something or somebody else. Namely, the ruler of this world. And they acted and did things in accordance with what they heard.

So we can say that they were dead as far as God was concerned but alive so far as the ruler of this world is concerned. Now I'm not very good at illustrations to try and get a point across but another way that might help us to understand the situation is if you think of a radio receiver which can be tuned to different frequencies.

So imagine, if you will such a set in the Coast Guard station but the Coast Guards have tuned it to the frequency of some transmitter sending out entertainment.

[ 7 : 03 ] Meanwhile, a ship in distress is sending out signals on the international distress wave band but because they are tuned to entertainment they are unable to pick up the distress signal.

They are alive to entertainment tuned into it, in fact but they are dead to the ship in distress. They're not there. That's roughly the picture here, isn't it?

People who are dead or deaf as a result to the call of God and who don't do what he wants but they're very much alive to the call of the ruler of this world and they do what he wants.

Paul then goes on to explain this way of life in less metaphorical, plain negative terms. This is a life characterized by transgressions and sins by the cravings of human sinful nature and its desires and thoughts.

And all this is the outcome of not listening to God but listening instead to what Paul calls the ruler of the kingdom of the air. He evidently believes in some kind of disembodied power or spirit opposed to God and with authority and control over the universe in which we live and we might say control of its media.

[ 8 : 30 ] When Paul talks about the air here he's thinking of the area around and surrounding the world including the world itself as opposed to heaven in a strict sense as the place where God lives.

So the thought is of a malign power which tempts mankind and then when they yield to temptation they come under its control. The effect is they disobey God they commit sins and transgressions they break God's commandments they're swayed by various lusts and desires that spring from their bodily and mental passions.

Note three things about this. The first is that what Paul is talking about are people's moral lies. The kind of things he's thinking about are the sort of sins that begin in the heart and mind such as the sexual lust that can replace love the selfishness that drives out loving and caring for other people the love of violence and power that chases away kindness and the desire for wealth and fame that tramples down other people.

These are the sort of actions that arise from the misuse of our mental and physical abilities for self-gratification. The cost is that of hurting other people treating them as mere things.

Paul would have defined all these actions in terms of disobeying the commands of God and of Jesus telling us to live in a different way.

[10:08] And the trouble in the world is that people who reject God's way often do so not simply because they're weak and find their desires too strong but because they genuinely believe that these things are right or at least permissible.

That's perhaps a worse state than simply doing them thoughtlessly. And people need to be shown and to realize that this is the case. The second thing to note is that Paul attributes all this to mankind yielding to the will of this evil power whom he calls the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

The idea is that although God created the world it's come under the rule of a usurper whose will is contrary to God and whose influence upon mankind is to produce evil in their lives.

Essentially Paul is saying the same as is said elsewhere in the Bible when he talks about Satan or the devil. Now some people find this hard to accept. One writer has said I quote the idea of a personal devil is all but unimaginable to the mind of our time and is capable of interpretation only as a personification of the external forces of evil which play upon human life.

So some people don't find the concept of a personal evil force particularly helpful. They're then left with nothing more than a catalogue of the evil things that people do.

[11:47] It seems to me the Bible is right in telling us that there's more to it than this. There is some sort of cosmic evil power that we need to make sense of the fact that evil in the world is something more than simply what human beings do and is universal in its sway.

Maybe personal is not the best word for it because the power is superhuman and it seems to be devoted to the destruction of what we would call personal values and personal relationships. relationships. So whether you call it a person or a personification or whatever it's something real and that's what matters. To recognize that there is an evil force in the world and that we're helpless to resist it.

Though note in parenthesis that that does not mean that it is omnipotent as people often think it is. It's not God. The third thing to note is that Paul says all this in plain black and white in universal terms.

He paints a picture of a depraved people and he implies and indeed he states quite clearly elsewhere that this is true of everybody in the world. And of course you may say as I want to say as well but I know people who are not Christians who are nice people and do good things.

[13:12] Their lives are not entirely selfish and lustful and violent. And I can certainly measure and say that some people are better than others and some are worse. Measured by human standards there is a spectrum from white to black and most of us are some shade of grey.

And yet here is Paul saying that all the greys are black. For measured by God's standards everybody falls short. Everybody is deaf.

You are either dead or alive. And ultimately it is his standards and his verdict that matter. And Paul is making it intensely individual.

He is not talking about people in general. He says as for you all of us also verse 3 probably he is thinking when he says this primarily about all kinds of people in the world particularly the division between Jews and Gentiles.

The two groups that between them comprised all ancient people. But he is speaking to each reader and hearer and addressing us as you in particular as an individual Jew or an individual Gentile.

[14:26] And the question is whether we are prepared to look at ourselves and accept that verdict as we look into our own lives and recognize that the springs of our action are not in accord with God's will as they ought to be.

Now it is important to emphasize here a point that might be overlooked. The picture of our state as death and inability to respond to God might be taken to imply that it is a situation for which we ourselves are not responsible.

It is something that has happened to us by force rather than by something we have chosen. But Paul speaks about it as disobedience and leaves us in no doubt that we are culpable.

So we mustn't push the metaphor of death beyond what Paul intends and make it suggest that we have no responsibility in the matter. You might put it by saying that we have willingly committed suicide rather than that we have simply been murdered.

But it is a serious state to begin for Paul goes on to say that we were by nature objects of wrath. Those who are dead as far as God is concerned are destined to suffer the consequences of their sin.

[ 15 : 51 ] That's true in two ways. The first is that people who think that living in sin is really living find that the reverse is true. Sin causes suffering both for other people and also for ourselves.

It creates a world of mutual lust and violence. Sin turns back upon the people who commit it and they live in fear and dread of what other people will do to them if they've got the power.

Of course it doesn't happen like this to every sinner does it? Some people seem to get away with it and to enjoy the fruits of their sin. They presumably wouldn't enjoy sinning quite so much otherwise. But then a second factor comes in, in which it is that by God's purpose sin leads to death instead of life. And this death comes to all who sin.

So there are almost two senses here of death. The death to God that we've been talking about so far but also a final judgment in which those who lived in sin and were dead to God will find in the end that they have died to all that makes life worth living.

[ 17 : 01 ] They will know what the wrath of God means. They experience his judgment. That again runs counter to the thinking of the world. Many people, most people, still think that sin pays dividends and that you will benefit by sinning.

You'll get what you want. But the Christian revelation says the opposite. It says, yes, sin does pay a dividend all right, but the dividend is death. And the fact of physical death which comes to all and which none can escape is a strong pointer to the truth of that declaration.

Physical life does come to an end and so does every other kind of life. The world refuses to take physical death seriously and runs away from it, but it's real and it's cruel and it's the sign of something worse.

So all that is, as the cliché has it, the bad news. So far we've been preparing ourselves to understand the central affirmation of the passage.

We've looked at the objects of the verb, now we come to the verb itself. God has made us alive and raised us up and seated us in the heavenly places.

[ 18 : 20 ] here there are lots of important things that demand our attention. The first is that what is described is the action of a loving God. The passage emphasizes that it's because of God's great mercy and love that he acted in this way.

It's emphasizing his motive. It's a picture of God taking pity on people in their sad state and doing something to rescue them. And Paul will pile on the language to stress the fact God is rich in mercy. God has loved us with a great love. And he'll come back to the thought in a moment. But simply note the fact as the basis here for all that follows. Secondly, it's emphasized that it is God who acts and not we ourselves.

Strictly speaking, dead people can't do anything. They can't make any response. Somehow help must come from outside and there's only one person who can do this, namely God.

There could be no stronger picture given of our absolutely helpless state. The blind and the lost can wonder about the world looking for safety. But the dead person is finished.

[ 19 : 35 ] They cannot do anything. It's a case of God or nothing. Thirdly, God performs an act of resurrection and the crucial words are that he did so by giving us life together with Christ.

Verse 5. Paul is looking back to that historical event when God raised Jesus from the dead and he sees in that act both the pledge of what God will do and the concrete means of it.

He says God raised Jesus from physical death and if he raised Jesus he will also raise up other people. The resurrection of Jesus is the tip of the iceberg, the sign of an action in which dead sinners are brought to life.

If he can do it for one, he'll do it for others. It's only as if it needs one resurrection to prove that death is not invincible. Of course that's not quite what Paul is saying.

He goes far beyond that. In saying he's not saying simply that the resurrection of Jesus is a sign that death can be defeated. He also wants to say, and he does say, that the resurrection of Jesus is the mighty act of God that actually raises us.

[ 20 : 53 ] We are included in it and its effects are felt in our experience. Paul puts this into the past tense.

Now, since Jesus was raised from physical death, we might have thought that Paul is talking simply about the possibility of our own future physical resurrection after we are physically dead.

But no, he says, God has made you alive, past tense. A spiritual resurrection has already taken place in the lives of his readers.

They've come to life spiritually, they've guaranteed a share in the physical and completely spiritual resurrection in time to come. What Paul is describing is what it means to become a Christian. And the picture is, it means being resurrected to a new life. And so, fifthly, Paul tells his readers that now, in effect, they're in a new plane of existence.

[ 21 : 57 ] Now they're living in the heavenly realms. Formerly, they lived in the sphere where the ruler of this world was supreme. Now they live in a new sphere in which God is supreme and they share in new life.

Very often nowadays, you see, you probably are yourself, a person or people going around with headphones over their ears or earplugs buried in them, and a small electronic machine in their bag or their pocket.

They can be so absorbed, we can be so absorbed, in music of whatever kind and quality, that in a sense we're not with it. We're in the world, but living in another realm that's close to people who aren't sharing the headphones.

Possibly we're half dead to this world and half alive to a different one of music. That's something like what Paul's trying to convey. The people he's addressing here have become alive in a new world.

It's already dawned for them, they're already living as the people of heaven, God is real for them in the here and now, they've been resurrected into a new plane of life, so although living physically on earth, they simultaneously are living in a new sphere in which life is as it is meant to be, a life of relationship with a living God.

[ 23 : 22 ] So that is what becoming a Christian means. But the passage hasn't yet come to an end, and the flow of thought continues. And Paul goes on in verse 7 to express the purpose of God's action.

It began as we saw with God's grace and favour. And Paul emphasised this by saying that it was while we were still dead that God had pity upon us.

But it's going to continue in the same way. What has happened is only a beginning. God's purpose is forever more to display his immense love toward us.

He's going to go on loving us and showering on us the treasures of his love. When Paul uses the word predestination as he does in chapter 1 and Romans chapter 8, his primary thought is what God intends as the destiny of those whom he has saved and brought to new life.

Predestination is really about making believers into sons and daughters of God who will be made like the image of their saviour and share in his glory. It's an ongoing process of salvation because God has predestined what he intends to happen to us, those whom he has raised to life and brought into his family.

[ 24 : 42 ] Moreover, we've seen how God's initial act of love towards us took place in and through Christ Jesus. It was his resurrection that was the means of God's love and saving power to us.

And so it will continue to be. He continues to show his kindness toward us, verse 7, through Jesus. He remains the channel of God's love and God's action sees us as linked to Jesus so that when God loves Jesus, he's also loving us.

Now, Paul could have stopped there, but he thought it necessary to go on and expand and elucidate this thought. Having used the word grace, he perhaps realized he could still not be fully understood.

And so he takes up the word and he briefly develops it. Let's see what he says. First, he says, we have been saved by grace. Or rather, he says, it's by grace that we've been saved and not by anything else.

What has been described is nothing less than a rescue operation. And the decisive factor on which this dependent is the free unmerited favor of God and his power to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves.

[ 26 : 06 ] But then secondly, if it's by grace, then we have done and can do nothing to deserve it. It doesn't depend on our doing anything. It's not, says Paul, in virtue of our good works.

Things that we might boast about and say, well, that was really me that did it. Nobody has got any claims on the grace of God. The Jews thought that if they tried to keep the law of God, that would win them his favor.

As for non-Jews who didn't keep his law, well, they've got no chance at all. But Paul wipes out this distinction by insisting that neither Jews nor Gentiles can merit divine favor.

and neither of them can do anything to lay claim to it. So how do people become the recipients of God's favor?

Paul's third point here is that they have to trust in God. They are saved by their faith. When God shows his favor towards them, they have to put their trust in him and commit themselves to him.

[ 27 : 13 ] You may well say, well, how on earth can dead people do that? How can they respond to God? How can they even believe in God? And Paul doesn't say. All that he does say is that when the gospel is preached, somehow the dead can be wakened to hear it, and they have the chance to respond, which they may or may not take.

And so Paul can say that the whole process is God's work, and we can claim no credit for it. But one thing more needed to be said. It would be easy to think that if all this is all God's work, then we are merely passive all the way through.

But remember that God's purpose was to bring us back to life, and life means activity. Those who were dead as far as God and his will were concerned were active, but in doing evil deeds.

God's things. So Paul's last word is that the resurrected people of God will be active in the good deeds which he has prepared for them to do. There's a program to be fulfilled in which we now participate so that the new life really is a life of action and obedience to God.

God's life. With that thought, the first part of the chapter concludes, but the implications of it are taken up in the second part, and we shall turn our attention to that in a few hours' time.

[ 28 : 41 ] For the moment, there must be some brief application of what we have read. First, this passage has reminded us all of our serious situation if we have not experienced the life-giving, resurrecting power of God.

We remain sinners under the judgment, or as Paul calls it, the judicial wrath of God. We have no hope of entry into his kingdom, which is for those who love and trust and obey him.

So this passage is a reminder to us to consider our spiritual situation and to get right with God. But it's not meant to make us continually wonder whether we're truly alive to God and to fill us with needless apprehensions.

Certainly, there is a need within any church congregation for some of us to be asking ourselves whether we have reached that happy day that fixed our choice on Christ as our Savior and our God. All the emphasis in this chapter, as we've seen, is certainly on what God has done, but not in such a way as to imply that salvation is something that happens to us apart from our own deliberate act and our trust in God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

[ 30 : 02 ] But secondly, Paul has written this, as I've been indicating, basically to people who have been saved. There is an important place in the Christian life and the activity of ourselves as a congregation for remembering the great things that God has done for us.

this is both to deepen our assurance of our salvation, but also to move us to the praise and glorification of God that's so powerfully described if you go back to the first chapter of this letter. For you could say that this letter begins with an expression of praise to God for his salvation, present and future. And then you could say that this second chapter contains fuel for stoking the blaze of thanksgiving.

And setting it alight. But thirdly and practically, this account of what God has done for us forms the basis for a reminder that our salvation constitutes a call to us to live the new life that formerly was closed to us.

The life of a new relationship with God in which we carry out the good deeds that are God's purpose for our lives. But also, the way in which God has saved us as individuals has got important implications for our communal life in the church.

[ 31 : 29 ] And we should consider very carefully the question, what has the fact that we are both saved by the grace of God to say to us about our relationships to the other people in God's church? church. And that's where we'll get to this evening. Amen. Amen.