

## Ephesians 2:1-10 The Greatness of His Power toward Us

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### Overview

Chapter 2 begins with another very convoluted sentence. The main parts of a sentence are subject, verb, and object, and each of these comes in a different verse!

- Subject: God, 2:4.
- Verb: three of them, in 2:5,6: “quicken together, raised up together, made sit together.”
- Object: hopeless sinners, 2:1-3, picked up by participial clause at start of 2:5.

This basic sentence deals with the fundamental display of God’s power toward us, corresponding to 1:20-21 (as the *συν-* verses show). 2:7 explains his motive with respect to the watching creation (compare 1:22a), while 2:8-10 explains his expectation for the church (compare 1:22b-23).

- In 1:20-23, the divisions were signaled by independent finite verbs.
- Here they are marked by shifts in temporal perspective: past (2:1-6), future (2:7), present (2:8-10).

Thus this entire section shows how the power that God demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead is now made available toward us in salvation.

### 2:1-7, The Power and the Motive

Consider each part of the sentence in turn.

#### 2:1-3, *The Object: Helpless Sinners*

The italics reflect the difficulty we have in English with such a convoluted sentence. The translators have correctly picked up the first of the three verbs describing God’s actions in 2:5, “quicken,” and made this a separate sentence to help us along. But in Greek, this section simply describes the objects of God’s actions, leaving those actions for later description.

### Overview

This paragraph is built around two fundamental contrasts that show how pervasive and devastating sin is.

Notice first the shift from “you” (2:1,2) to “we also” (2:3). The Ephesian church is a gentile church (2:11), but sin is a problem for Jews like Paul as well as for gentiles. (Compare this dual statement with Rom. 1-2, which leads to the conclusion in Rom 3:9, “we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.”)

Each of these ethnically focused sections then has two parts, contrasting our sinful *state* with our sinful *actions*. Sin is not just something we do; it is something we are.

Overall movement:

Sin as	Gentile	Jew
State	2:1 “dead in trespasses and sins”	2:3b “we were by nature the children of wrath”
Action	2:2 “wherein ... ye walked”	2:3a “among whom also we all had our conversation”

*Note: Alford insists that “we all” in Pauline usage (Rom 4:16; 8:32; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:18) must mean “Jew and Gentile together, but none of these passages exhibits the “you-we” contrast. The equally Pauline usage of this contrast (get examples from other sermon notes) bears out the distinction made here. ... Alford may be right here; the Jewish features of v.3 can be justified by the need to include Jews, and need not show that exclusively Jews are in focus.*

### 2:1, *Gentile State*

**Dead.**—Not physical, but spiritual, separation from God. Cf. the introduction of death in the Garden:

- Gen 2:17, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”
- 3:1-7, the point of the serpent’s argument is that they would NOT die, that is, physically.
- But their sin cut them off from God. They were no longer comfortable in fellowship with him (3:8), and God put them out of his private garden (3:23-24).
- Cf. Isa 59:1,2, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid [his] face from you, that he will not hear.”
- Cf. Eph 4:18, “being alienated from the life of God.”

**In trespasses and sins.**—The scriptures regularly link sin and death:

- Gen 2:17
- Rom 6:23, “the wages of sin is death”
- Most eloquently, Rom 5:12-17.

The simplest reading would be that you are dead *because* you have sinned. But the situation is actually a little more complicated than that, as Rom 5:14 makes clear: even during the period when sin was not imputed, there was still death. It is Adam’s single sin that has made us sinners and thus led to our death, a death that then manifests itself in our repeated sin.

*Adam Sinned → We are Dead Sinners → We Sin*

The reference to trespasses and sins is not to give the cause of their death, but to specify its nature. He is not referring to physical death, but to the kind of death associated with trespasses and sins. “Look at you, dead in the midst of your trespasses and sins.” The point is not causal order, but association with one another.

### 2:2, *Gentile Actions*

Now he shifts focus from their state of spiritual deadness to their conduct in that state. Note

**What did they do?**—“Wherein ye walked,” indicating habitual, regular conduct. The unbeliever does not sin occasionally here and there in an otherwise neutral life. His entire conduct is one of rebellion against God.

**When did they do it?**—“Once,” before they received Christ. This description is of their past life. As 2:10 will emphasize, it is completely inappropriate to their present state as believers.

**Whom did they follow?**—Paul devotes most of this verse to probing the spiritual roots of their sin. Unbelievers think that they are autonomous and free. In fact, they are enslaved to Satan, who rules the unbelievers as clearly as Christ is the head of the church. Paul develops this first by describing the head, then by describing his kingdom. In each case there are two descriptions.

“According to”: the head

Notice the two parallel “according to” phrases. Their conduct is not independent, but represents servile obedience to an external standard. That standard is first described impersonally, then attributed to a personal influence.

**“The course of this world.”**—The “world” is the sinful system of fallen creation. It is not random, but has a “course,” a natural flow or way of doing things, from which God’s people are called to come out and be separate. Before our salvation, we went along with that general course of behavior. We were like the world, approving its patterns and shaping ourselves like it. Cf. Rom. 12:1, “be not conformed to this world,” as we were before our salvation. Now that we have forsaken this path, we can expect to do battle with these forces, as outlined in Eph. 6:10-12.

**“The prince.”**—Now we move from the impersonal system to the personal spirit who leads it, Satan. He is why it is systematic and orderly: it is subject to him. The unbeliever is not free, but is a slave to Satan.

- John 8:44 Ye are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.
- Reve 12:9 the great dragon ..., that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world:

### Satan’s Kingdom

Now follow two genitive phrases, each descriptive of Satan’s kingdom, those over whom he rules. The first focuses on his spiritual minions, the second on his impact on the minds of men.

**“The power of the air.”**—The air is pervasive, inescapable, all around us, and Paul here teaches that the ἐξουσία “authority” of Satan and his minions is just as pervasive. Just as he governs the general course of this whole world, so his spirits are all around us. “Authority” is here in a collective sense, much like “government,” the sum of all these beings.

**“The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”**—This is parallel to “power,” not “prince.” Satan is the prince of the power of the air, and of the spirit that now worketh....

- “Spirit” here is in a general sense, such as “the spirit of meekness” (Gal 6:1), “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12), or “the spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3). That rebellious attitude which men treasure as evidence of their independence from God, is actually directed and controlled by Satan.
- “children of disobedience” (Col 3:6) is a Hebrew expression. Since a child often resembles his parents, to be a “child of X” or a “son of X” means to be characterized by X. Cf. Isa

## Ephesians 2a The Greatness of His Power toward Us

57:4, “children of transgression”; Hos. 10:9 “children of iniquity,” “children of wrath” (v.3).

- “now worketh,” in contrast with “you who *were* dead” and “*in time past* you walked.” We were no better than they, but we have left that company; they continue in their satanic delusion.

### 2:3a, Jewish Actions

Note the contrasts with v.2. These contrasts serve to heighten the condemnation.

**“We all”**.—Jew and Gentile alike, not just gentiles. The corruption of sin is so great that it pervades even the chosen people. But the following terms show that the nature of their depravity, or at least of their condemnation, has a different focus than the Gentile.

**“Had our conversation”**.—*αναστρεφομαι*, in contrast with *περιπατεω* in v.2. *Αναστρεφομαι* emphasizes the context in which conduct takes place, while *περιπατεω* emphasizes the specific nature of the conduct. (*See separate study.*) Thus the Gentile is condemned for walking according to the dictates of Satan. The Jew is condemned for failing to maintain holiness as God’s “peculiar people,” and instead mingling with the “children of disobedience.” NB: the higher standard to which God calls those who bear his name.

**“In the lusts of our flesh”**.—Contrast this internal motivation to sin with the external one in v.2. Yes, “the devil made me do it,” but apart from his influence my own lusts led me astray. Rom. 7:14-24 is an eloquent commentary on his struggle with these inner forces. This lament makes sense only to the pious Jew, not to the pagan Gentile.

Paul expands “lusts of the flesh” to “desires of the flesh and of the mind,” thus involving the mind and showing that the humanistic love of learning and reason is no less conducive to sin than what we think of more commonly as “lust.” We particularly need this reminder, living in a University town.

### 2:3b, Jewish State

Notice three expressions here:

**By nature**.—A clear indication that we are returning to the description of state rather than actions, and a clear indication of the hopeless condition of all men. Even the Jews are “by nature” wicked, sinful, lost. Generations of pure descent from the patriarchs cannot convey on them any benefit in God’s eyes.

**The children of wrath**.—The same Hebrew idiom applied to the Gentiles; characterized by, deserving, of God’s wrath. Note that this condition is theirs “by nature.”

Why isn’t this man’s wrath, saying that people are naturally wrathful? Robinson gives two good reasons:

1. 5:6, “for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience,” closely links the two concepts that here are associated for Jew and Gentile.
2. The phrase is setting us up for the contrast with God’s mercy and love in 2:4.

The Gentile’s natural condition was “dead in trespasses and sins,” separated from God. This is a bad condition, but fairly passive, in comparison with the state of the Jew, being a “child of

wrath.” To whom much has been given, of them shall much be required. Recall the Lord’s words to Chorazin and Bethsaida in Matt. 11:21,22.

**Even as others.**—Yet it is not the case that the Gentile’s separation exempts him from the active wrath of God; here Paul draws him back into the focus. Here is the general statement corresponding to Rom. 3:9.<sup>1</sup>

*Application*

This entire paragraph emphasizes the common state of all people in sin and Satan’s control, and shows how exceptional is our condition in Christ. We are indeed a “peculiar people” (Exod 19:5; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9). We should not be surprised if the world thinks we are strange or unusual; we are “holy,” set apart, and our conduct should reflect this aspect of our position in Christ. How precious we will find that position when the mass of humanity finds that the “course of this world” that they are following, the “spirit” that they are obeying, leads them into the lake of fire.

At the same time, the condemnation of the Jew shows how fearful it is to neglect the privilege that is ours. No true believer can ever be lost, but many raised under the sound of the gospel may think themselves to be saved, and yet may neglect the practical sin in their lives that shows them to be unregenerate. Their judgment will be harsher because of the knowledge that they enjoy.

**2:4, The Subject: God**

The main point of this verse is to describe God as merciful. The word emphasizes the *need* of the recipient. Luke 10:37 uses the word to describe the attitude of the good Samaritan toward the man fallen among thieves. After highlighting our pitiable condition, Paul shows us God’s response to that condition.

This description has two features of interest to us: a contrast and a cause.

*Contrast: God’s mercy and our misery*

The dominant feature of the description of God is the parallelism of two participles: God is described as “being rich in mercy,” a construction that is put in parallel with the reprise of us as “being dead in trespasses and sins.” The idea is that he comes across us in our helpless dead condition, and takes mercy on us.

Paul may very well have the graphic picture of Ezek 16:1-6 in view here. Notice:

Ezek 16	Eph 2
3, Gentile origin of Israel (cf. Josh 24:2, 14)	1, “you” = Gentiles
5, infant cast out to perish “in thy blood” = defilement	1, “dead in trespasses and sins”
5-6, no one pitied חַוֵּד (Greek φειδομαι <i>feidomai</i> ), but God did	4, God is rich in mercy ελεος

*Cause: Mercy results from Love*

God’s mercy is *not* universal. As he taught Moses (Ex 33:19) and reemphasizes through Paul (Rom 9:15-18), “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” but whom he will, he hardens.

The remaining clause in the verse explains why God took pity on us: “For his great love” = “Because of his great love.” This little point of syntax makes an extremely important point. God

<sup>1</sup> Or the contrast may be between “we” who ended up saved and the other Jews who did not, comparable to the end of 2:2, where “in the children of disobedience” is broader than “you.”

does not love us because we repent and turn to him. He sets his love upon us while we are pitiable, miserable in our sin, and without any help. His love is fundamentally the elective principle that leads him to select us from the mass of humanity and begin the process of regenerating us. Compare

- 1 John 4:19, “we love him because he *first* loved us.” His love came first; our response to him was just that, a response.
- Rom 5:8, “God commendeth his love toward us in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us.”
- 2 Thess 2:13, “brethren beloved of the Lord” corresponds to “foreknowledge” in Rom 8:29 and 1 Pet 1:2.

This principle is reflected in the social pattern, already clear in the Bible, that it is the man who loves and seeks out the woman in marriage. The idea of symmetry in our own age, by which the woman may take the initiative toward a man whom she desires, perverts the picture of marriage that God so often uses to instruct us concerning our relation to himself.

**2:5-6, The Verbs: Union with Christ and in Christ**

The three finite past tense verbs reach back to what has already been said.

- The first, “quicken” (“made alive”) recalls 2:1 “dead.” God has repaired the damage done in Eden. Adam’s sin killed not only him and his posterity, but (by imputation) the Lord Jesus. When our Lord was quickened, we were quickened with him. The interjection, “By grace ye are saved,” is a link forward to 2:8, and emphasizes that this quickening is independent of any merit on the part of those quickened.
- “Raised” and “made sit” are the same two verbs as 1:20. God did not simply replace our death with life, but permits us to share in our Lord’s glorious resurrection and heavenly access.

Our Lord is named twice in these verses, in different relations with the three main verbs.

- “together with Christ” emphasizes that these are the same experiences that Christ shared. In fact, each of the three verbs has the prefix “together,” sending us back to the description in 1:20. We were there with him when God’s power was poured out on him.
- “in Christ Jesus” explains *how* we have shared in these experiences: because God has placed us in this mysterious position “in Christ” that we saw so often in ch. 1. The table below shows that this expression distinctly belongs to discussions of Christians together, as a body. It is characteristic of Ephesians and the salutations of Romans, but not of the body of Romans. (I have omitted “believe in Christ” and other such expressions, counting only those that speak of the position of believers in Christ.)

Expression	Romans	Ephesians
In Christ	6x (four in ch. 16, describing other believers)	7x
In him	0	2
In whom	0	5

**2:7, The Motive: Display of God's Grace**

As the verbs in 2:5-6 show, 2:1-6 have the same focus as 1:20-21, God's work in Christ toward his people. Like 1:22a, 2:7 shows the relation of that work toward the rest of creation, those who do not participate directly in the work either as redeemer or redeemed. There, the point was that all things are placed under Christ's feet. Here, they are made the observers of God's grace displayed in him.

Big point here: the purpose in God's salvation of us is not first of all our happiness, but the exhibition of his grace to a watching universe.<sup>2</sup>

- Rom. 11:36, "of him, and through him, and to him are all things."
- Col 1:16, "all things were created by him, and for him."
- Rev 4:11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Recall 1:6,12,14, which teach that the work of all members of the godhead has as its aim God's glory, and in particular (1:6) the "glory of his grace."

The audience for this display is elsewhere identified as the angels. Cf.

- 3:10
- Rev 4,5
- The cherubim overarching the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant are perhaps symbolic of this interest on the part of the angels.
- In 1 Cor 10:10, this may explain the interest of the angels in the meetings of God's saints.

**Application.**—We should realize that we are God's display to the host of heaven, and we must conduct ourselves in a way that brings glory to him. Cf. Satan's slander in Job 1. Each one of us, like Job, is crucial to displaying God's glory.

At this point, it is helpful to summarize the various words Paul has used for God's kindly attributes toward us, and recall their relation to one another.

- 2:4 has mercy and love, with love as the motivator.
- 2:7 has kindness and grace, with grace being displayed through kindness. Thus grace is the motivator and kindness the result.

Definitions:

- Love is an autonomous inner commitment that leads to elective choice, Mal 1:2.
- Mercy emphasizes the *need* of the recipient. Luke 10:37 uses the word to describe the attitude of the good Samaritan toward the man fallen among thieves.
- Kindness emphasizes the *benevolence* of the one who is kind.
- Grace emphasizes the *unworthiness* of the recipient, cf. 1 Pet 2:19,20.

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<sup>2</sup>See Calvin's letter to Sadolet (CD edition, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 98) on this point.

Thus we have God's love and grace leading to his mercy and kindness. An important difference between love and grace is that (as here) it is his grace rather than his love that is the object of public exposition and proclamation. Paul describes the gospel as "the gospel of the grace of God," Acts 20:24, but never "the gospel of the love of God." His love is wonderful and mysterious, and precious to those who have received it, but what he wants to show throughout the ages to come is his gracious character, that though absolutely sovereign and holy he yet deals with sinners in mercy and kindness. This should guide our preaching and evangelism.

## **2:8-10, God's Grace toward Us**

These verses, with a present perspective, correspond to 1:22b-23, emphasizing the work that God is doing through his redeemed church. There we were the body fulfilling the mission of our Head, the Lord Jesus. Here as well our efforts are in view, but very clearly described as the *result* of our salvation rather than its *cause*.

Too often we quote 8-9 without verse 10. The first two verses emphasize that our salvation is *free*, while the last verse emphasizes that it is *effective*. Cf. the same dichotomy in Titus 3:4-7, 8.

### **8-9, Salvation is Free**

#### **8a, How we are saved**

It is "by grace," in demonstration of that attribute of God that he wants to exhibit to the watching universe. Our role is limited to that of receiving the gift.

Compare this verse, saved "by grace through faith," with Rom 3:24, justified "by grace through redemption." That verse emphasizes the foundation for God's grace in Christ's sacrifice, which permits him to be both "just and ... justifier" (Rom 3:26). Salvation by grace is only available to us through faith because Christ paid the penalty for our sin.

#### **8b-9, How we are not saved**

The two negative phrases describe "that." But what is "that"? Neuter pronoun, but both "grace" and "faith" are feminine. Better understood of the whole complex, salvation by grace through faith.

**Not of yourselves.**—Established by contrast: salvation is the "gift of God." We did not conceive it, earn it, or carry it out. It is God's salvation, not ours.

**Not of works.**—Established by purpose: "lest any man should boast." What we work for is owed to us, and we get the credit for receiving it. Cf. Rom 4:4; 11:6.

With these two negative statements, compare the contrast in Rom 6:23.

- The wages of sin is death. That we earn on our own, and fully deserve.
- The gift of God is eternal life. Paul shifts from "wages" to "gift" to emphasize the asymmetry.

### **10, Salvation is Effective**

Notice our *origin* and our *purpose*.

**Our Origin.**—Key terms here emphasize our salvation as a work of creation.

- “workmanship”<sup>3</sup>: Isa 29:16 of people as the work of the potter. Recalls God’s sovereignty in forming us.
- “created”: Brings us back to the contrast between Adam and Christ, reminding us that we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- “before ordained”: perhaps better rendered, “prepared beforehand.” Used elsewhere in Rom 9:23 of “the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” The point is that our new creation has a specific purpose in view.

All three of these terms emphasize that we are the passive objects of God’s creative and purposive power. Thus v.10 begins with the same emphasis on sovereign grace as 8-9.

**Our Purpose.**—That purpose is:

- “unto good works”: The expression appears 16x in the NT, always being urged on the readers. We need to be careful that in preaching salvation by grace through faith, we do not disparage good works in the lives of those who are saved. The first occurrence in the NT is Matt. 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
- “that we should walk in them”: Same verb as in 2:2. God delivered us from following the course of this world, that we might follow the course he has laid out for us.

## Summary

Since 1:20, we have been meditating on “the exceeding greatness of his power” (1:20-23) “to us-ward who believe” (2:1-10). Each half has three sub-sections, distinguished as finite verbs in the first half and by time perspective in the second, and dealing with the same three themes.

**Life-Giving Power.**—The Father raised the Son and seated him at his own right hand in heavenly places (1:20-21), and has raised and seated us along with him, delivering us from our death in trespasses and sins (2:1-6).

**Cosmic Contrast.**—The Father has placed all things under the Son’s feet (1:22a), and manifests his grace through us to the watching universe (2:7).

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<sup>3</sup> Only used 2x in the NT, here and Rom 1:20 (of God’s work in creation). In the OT, the word is 27x, mostly for man’s works, and often evil ones (3x before Pss). 8x of God:

- Ps 63:10; 91:5; 142:5 (LXX references; ET 64:9; 92:4; 143:4), the only refs in Pss: a source of encouragement to those who see them.
- The word appears 18x in Ecc, mostly of human works, but has four references to the inscrutability of God’s works: 3:11 “no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” 7:13 “Consider the work of God: for who can make [that] straight, which he hath made crooked?” 8:17 “Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek [it] out, yet he shall not find [it]; yea further; though a wise [man] think to know [it], yet shall he not be able to find [it].” 11:5 “As thou knowest not what [is] the way of the spirit, [nor] how the bones [do grow] in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”
- Isa 29:16 of the potter’s work.

**Ongoing Victory.**—The church is the fulness of its risen head (1:22b-23), particularly equipped for good works (2:8-10).

## Notes

### *Greek Words for Conduct*

<i>Αναστρεφομαι, αναστροφη</i>	<i>περιπατεω</i>
About 20x	About 90x
Mostly non-Pauline (only 6 Paul + 3 Heb)	Predominantly Paul
Has noun form	No noun form
Heb שׁוּב (though figurative uses often translate הלך)	Heb הלך
Maybe “walk about,” less directed?	More definite course in mind?

Key: look at Pauline books with both and try to find useful contrasts.

### 1. *Αναστρεφομαι, αναστροφη*

The noun is always used figuratively. It occurs 3x in the LXX, in the apocryphal books, always in the sense of “conduct.”

The verb is LXX for שׁוּב, except when it has the metaphorical meaning, when it usually represents הלך.

This distribution suggests that in the sense of “conduct,” the noun is primary and the verb is used when there is a syntactical need to capture this sense as a verb.

In general, *περιπατεω* describes some specific mode of conduct, with a rather precise moral qualifier, while *αναστρεφομαι* refers more generically to conduct in the abstract or with generic qualifiers like *καλως*, *αγιως*, etc. *Αναστρεφομαι* is a more general word for “conduct,” while *περιπατεω* requires the explicit moral direction to assume the figurative sense. On the other hand, *αναστρεφομαι* often emphasizes the context of our conduct (1 Tim 3:15 “the house of God,” 2 Cor 1:12 “in the world,” Eph 2:3 “among whom,” 1 Pet 2:12 “among the Gentiles”). Thus *περιπατεω* emphasizes the nature of the conduct, while *αναστρεφομαι* emphasizes its context.

Sometimes both the nature and the context of the conduct are described, then the choice of verb may indicate where the focus lies. E.g., 1 Thes 4:12; 2 Thes 3:11 (*περιπατεω*, focusing on the nature of the walk); 2 Cor 1:12; Eph 2:3 (*αναστρεφομαι*, focusing on the context).

### 2. *περιπατεω*

This is by far the more common form (90 vs. 20), so should be considered unmarked.

No noun form (unlike English, where we talk about “walking the walk”).

Based on LXX ἡλῆ.

### **3. ΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΟΜΑΙ, ΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΜΑ**

“To have one’s citizenship,” only by Paul and in two politically charged contexts: his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1, and the letter from Rome to the Philippians (1:27; 3:20). Conduct as determined by allegiance.