

## BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

### STUDY SIX

## You Were Dead . . . But God!

*Ephesians 2:1–10*

*The Scriptures contain numerous contrasts. Dark and light. Heaven and hell. Love and hate. Bondage and freedom. Death and life. In every one of these contrasts, God alone makes the difference. Between dark and light stands God. Between death and life stands God.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**P**AUL opens Ephesians 2 abruptly: “Once you were dead” (Ephesians 2:1). This statement is meant to grab our attention and even shock us. How can a living person once be dead? We might be scratching our heads over it until we link it to Paul’s line of thought from the previous chapter.

In Ephesians 1, Paul praised God for His power that “raised Christ from the dead” (1:20). Christ was dead in the tomb until God resurrected Him. Spiritually speaking, we were dead too until God raised us. Just as God gave life to Christ, God also “gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead” (2:5).

This theological concept is called, *regeneration*. In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll explains what it means to be regenerated.

This is what we call being “born again,” made alive in the eyes of God and spiritually incorporated into Christ (John 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Now believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who makes us willing and able to do what was impossible in our spiritually dead state.<sup>1</sup>

In our dead state, we were spiritually cut off from God, our true source of life. We were dead in our sins . . . *but God!* Those are the greatest two words! What did God do? He made us alive with Christ! When we were powerless to change our condition, God stepped in and saved us.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

**You Were Dead . . . But God!**

*Ephesians 2:1–10*

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.  
(Ephesians 2:8 NASB)*

The only way to fully appreciate our new life in Christ is to grasp the desperate condition of our old life without Christ. What was it like before God rescued us? Paul answers this question in Ephesians 2:1–3, and then he goes on to answer three other questions in verses 4–9:

- What did God do for us (2:4–6)?
- Why did God do it (2:4–7)?
- How can we receive God’s gift of new life (2:8–9)?

Indeed, the first line of Ephesians 2 is abrupt . . . and somber. It pictures a harsh, desperate, death-like existence when we lived in sin. Thankfully, God delivered us from sin’s Death Valley and led us into the promised land of new life in Christ. And Paul tells us the amazing truth of how God did it!



**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Deliverance is a prominent theme in the Bible. Ephesians 2 reads like a kind of Passover seder. “Once you toiled under Pharaoh’s reign of death,” Paul seems to say, “but then God rescued you through the blood of the lamb and out of the watery tomb of the Red Sea.” God delivers His people again and again throughout Scripture—from bondage to freedom, exile to return, judgment to mercy, death to life.

As you open the Word, reflect on how God has delivered you and offer Him a prayer of thanks using these verses as a guide:

*He reached down from heaven and rescued me;  
he drew me out of deep waters. . . .  
He led me to a place of safety;  
he rescued me because he delights in me. . . .  
The LORD lives! Praise to my Rock!  
May the God of my salvation be exalted! (Psalm 18:16, 19, 46)*



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**TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Read *Ephesians 2:1–9* in two Bible translations to get an overview of the passage. Look for Paul’s transition, “but God” (*Ephesians 2:4*), which forms a hinge in the passage from being dead in sin to our new life in Christ.



**Observation: Our Nature, God’s Action**

Observation is the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. We observe contrasts and comparisons and cause and effect; we look for repeated words, phrases, or patterns.<sup>2</sup> For example, in *Ephesians 2:1–3*, Paul answers the question, “What is it like without Christ?” by making three points about *our condition* in sin. Then, in *2:4–6*, Paul answers the question, “What did God do for us?” by listing three of *God’s actions* on our behalf when He united us with Christ. Let’s take a closer look.

**What Was It like without Christ? Ephesians 2:1–3**

Like a physician with a stethoscope, God listened for a spiritual heartbeat in us when we were in “trespasses and sins” (*Ephesians 2:1* NASB), but no sign of life could be found. Outwardly, we looked and acted alive. But spiritually, we were dead.

Paul listed the causes of spiritual death in *Ephesians 2:2–3*. Read these verses in the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible. In the following chart, we’ve listed Paul’s points in the left column. In the right column, write down your paraphrase of these points. Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of *Ephesians 2:1–3* in *The Message* may help with wording.

Paul’s Points	Your Paraphrase
“you formerly walked according to the course of this world” ( <i>Ephesians 2:2a</i> NASB)	
“you formerly walked . . . according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” ( <i>2:2b</i> NASB)	
“we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” ( <i>2:3</i> NASB)	



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According to Paul, we “were *by nature* children of wrath, even as the rest” (Ephesians 2:3 NASB, emphasis added). Not only were we sinners by choice; we were sinners by nature. We were born with a natural inclination to sin; therefore, as Jesus said, we “must be born again” (John 3:7). Otherwise, without new life from God, our destiny would be eternal death—that is, eternal separation from God. But, thankfully, God made us alive by joining us with Christ.

*Since we were dead, we needed life, and God made us alive. Since we were in the valley of death, we needed to be raised up. He did that. Since we were powerless and corrupt and hopelessly condemned, we needed a new position. He provided that. He did it all!*  
—Chuck Swindoll

**What Did God Do for Us? Ephesians 2:4–6**

Can you find the ways that God gave us new life in the following passage? Use your cursor to highlight the main action words or underline them in your Bible.

*But God . . . gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4–6)*

Compare these verses with [Ephesians 1:19–20](#). Write down the parallels you see between what God did for us and how He displayed His power in Christ.

Notice the contrasts with our former way of life. We were dead, but God *made us alive*; we were sinking in sin’s mire, but God *raised us* to a new, clean life; we were destined for judgment, but God *seated us* securely in heaven with His Son. We were helpless to do any of this, but God did it all by placing us in Christ—a new position to replace our old condition in sin.



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### **Interpretation: God’s Nature, Our Response**

Why would God go to such great lengths to rescue dead, sin-entrenched people? Not because underneath it all we’re so wonderful—but because above all He’s so wonderful!

#### **Why Did God Save Us? Ephesians 2:4–7**

Read *Ephesians 2:4–7* and write down four characteristics of God’s nature.

Do you recall the ten spiritual blessings Paul sang like a praise song in Ephesians 1? Paul’s melody of God’s grace crescendos to a climax in Ephesians 2. “It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!” (Ephesians 2:5) and later, “God saved you by his grace” (2:8)—which Chuck defines as, “God’s unmerited favor unconditionally demonstrated to the undeserving.”<sup>3</sup>

Describe the grace message Paul declared in *2:4–7*. What was Paul saying about God and the reason God saved us?

#### **How Can We Receive God’s Gift of New Life? Ephesians 2:8–9**

Paul didn’t begin Ephesians 2 by saying we’re “sick” and need a cure, or “mixed-up” and need direction, or “ignorant” and need education. Rather, Paul pronounced us *dead*. No therapy or self-help course could help us, and no self-effort could bring us to life. No righteous deeds could win God’s favor. How, then, could we be saved?



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What answer did Paul give in *Ephesians 2:8–9*? What do these verses teach about the source of our salvation, the nature of salvation, and the way we do and don't receive it?

If we have received it, our salvation was accomplished not by our works but by God's grace. As Paul taught in Ephesians 1, the Father initiated the plan, the Son implemented it, the Spirit empowers it, and each member of the Trinity receives the glory!

*So salvation is a gift. It's not of ourselves. God holds out the gift of eternal life, the gift of forgiven sins, the gift of a secure heaven, the gift of a whole new transformed way of thinking. What a marvelous gift! You can live above the drag of demonic forces and the pleadings of your inner desires. You can live through the power of Christ, having been raised with Him. —Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: The Role of Faith**

God saved us “by his grace when [we] believed” (Ephesians 2:8). Faith isn't a work of righteousness but a posture of rest—the opposite of working. We express faith when we receive the gift of salvation God offers and rest in His promise.

Who exemplifies saving faith in *Romans 4:1–5*? What points did Paul make about faith and works in this passage that are similar in Ephesians 2:8–9?



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What are we saying to God when we express in words the faith in our hearts? “Lord, I trust that what You say is true. I trust You to keep Your promises. I accept Your gift of salvation, and I now live this new life every moment through Your grace and power.” Even if you’ve prayed a prayer like this before, take a moment to affirm your faith in Christ by repeating these words again now. Expressions of heartfelt faith never grow old!

 **Application: Warning and Reminder**

As we draw our study to a close, we conclude with a warning and a reminder. First, *don’t be fooled into thinking that those who are “dead” are fulfilled in their worldly pursuits*. Sometimes we envy others who we think have it all in this life apart from Christ. Don’t fall into that trap; rather, keep your eyes on the Savior as the source of all true blessings. He is our portion forever!

Second, *real relief comes by understanding and embracing grace*. God unites us with Christ and breathes life into our dead souls by His grace. All good things come by grace! How can you depend on God’s grace today to do something that seems impossible?

What new insight about God did you learn through this study of Ephesians 2:1–9? Write a *truth statement* that you can carry in your thoughts today and through the week when you need to connect to God, your source of life.

We were dead . . . *but God!* What an incredible message the Lord has given us through Paul’s pen! Share it with someone who needs hope today.



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**A FINAL PRAYER**

For the closing prayer, meditate on Charles Wesley’s lines from the hymn, “And Can It Be.” And then offer God praise for giving you life, raising you with Christ, and seating you with Him in the heavenlies.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
Thine eye diffused the quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.<sup>4</sup>

**ENDNOTES**

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 187.
2. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 188.
4. Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be,” [hymnal.net](http://hymnal.net), [hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296](http://hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296).

