
THE GENEROSITY OF GOD'S PLAN (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

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TEXT

Generosity of God's Plan. ^a You were dead in your transgressions and sins ² in which you once lived following the age of this world, ^{*} following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the disobedient. ^b ³ All of us once lived among them in the desires of our flesh, following the wishes of the flesh and the impulses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest. ^c ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us,

^{*} The recipients of Paul's letter have experienced, in their redemption from *transgressions and sins*, the effect of Christ's supremacy over the power of the devil (Eph 2:1-2; cf. Eph 6:11-12), who rules not from the netherworld but from the air between God in heaven and human beings on earth. Both Jew and Gentile have experienced, through Christ, God's free gift of salvation that already marks them for a future heavenly destiny (Eph 2:3-7). The language *dead, raised us up*, and *seated us ... in the heavens* closely parallels Jesus' own passion and Easter experience. The terms in Eph 2:8-9 describe salvation in the way Paul elsewhere speaks of justification: *by grace, through faith, the gift of God, not from works*; cf. Gal 2:16-21; Rom 3:24-28. Christians are a newly created people in Christ, fashioned by God for a life of goodness (Eph 2:10).

^a Col 1:21; 2:13.

^{*} These verses comprise one long sentence in Greek, the main verb coming in Eph 2:5, God *brought us to life*, the object you/us *dead in ... transgressions* being repeated in Eph 2:1, 5; cf. Col 2:13.

^{*} *Age of this world*: or "aeon," a term found in gnostic thought, possibly synonymous with the *rulers of this world*, but also reflecting the Jewish idea of "two ages," this present evil age and "the age to come"; cf. 1 Cor 3:19; 5:10; 7:31; Gal 1:4; Ti 2:12. *The disobedient*: literally, "the sons of disobedience," a Semitism as at Is 30:9.

^b 6:12; Jn 12:31; Col 1:13.

^c Col 3:6-7.

^{5d}even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ* (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,^e ⁷ that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.^f ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God;^g ⁹ it is not from works, so no one may boast.^h ¹⁰ For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.ⁱ ¹

From Death to Life

2 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, **2** ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας **3** ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἤμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ **4** ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, **5** καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ¹,—χάριτι² ἔστε σεσωσμένοι— **6** καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, **7** ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. **8** τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ἔστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον **9** οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. **10** αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν. ²

^d Rom 5:8; 6:13; Col 2:13.

* Our relation through baptism *with Christ*, the risen Lord, is depicted in terms of realized eschatology, as already exaltation, though Eph 2:7 brings in the future aspect too.

^e Rom 8:10–11; Phil 3:20; Col 2:12.

^f 1:7.

^g Rom 3:24; Gal 2:16.

^h 1 Cor 1:29.

ⁱ 4:24; Ti 2:14.

¹ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eph 2:1–10.

² Barbara Aland et al., eds., [The Greek New Testament](#), Fifth Revised Edition. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Eph 2:1–10.

He Tore Down the Wall (Eugene Peterson)

2: ¹⁻⁶ It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. ⁷⁻¹⁰ Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.³

We were all Dead: God Gave us Life through Christ (JB Philipps)

Ephesians 2: 1-3 - To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else. **4-10** - But even though we were dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ—it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved—and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Eph 2:1-10.

COMMENTARY

I began to study this passage on 19 October 2020, when I was in the process of preparing a Night School with Dante Alighieri as our guest. There was so much in this particular text that reminded me of the *Commedia*.

Verse 1 – “ALIVE” IN SPIRITUAL DEATH - The trouble with men and women is not merely that they are out of harmony with their environment and with their fellows. They are ‘alienated from the life of God’ (4:18), that is, with respect to their true spiritual nature they are *dead through ... trespasses and sins*. **There is probably no essential difference between the two nouns: the root meaning of the first is ‘missing the mark’ and of the second ‘slipping’ or ‘falling from the way’, and thus both express the failure of people to live as they could and should. They were made in God’s image to live as children in his family, aware of his presence, rejoicing in his direction. Freedom was given, but with it a warning that it involved the possibility of disobedience, and that disobedience would lead to death (Gen. 2:17). This death is not primarily physical death, but the loss of the spiritual life given, life in fellowship with God and the consequent capacity for spiritual activity and development. Thus the description here is not merely metaphorical, nor does it refer only to the future state of the sinners. It describes their present condition, and indeed the Bible often speaks therefore of humanity in a state of spiritual death because of sin (e.g. Ezek. 37:1–14; Rom. 6:23; 7:10, 24; Col. 2:13), and needing nothing less than new life from God (cf. Eph. 5:14; John 3:3; 5:24).**⁴

Verse 2 on WALKING – “The sinful condition of humanity is **lifeless and motionless** as far as any Godward activity is concerned. Viewed from another standpoint it is a ‘walk’, a taking of step after step, in evil (cf. 4:17). The Jews called their laws of conduct *Halakah*, which means ‘Walking’ (cf. Mark 7:5, Acts 21:21; Heb. 13:9, RV mg.). This figure is used later in this letter (2:10; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15), as elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:7; Col. 4:5; 1 John 1:6; 2 John 4) for the progress of the Christian life; **but here it describes a life lived according to an authority contrary to God.**”⁵

Verse 2 on THIS AGE (*aion*) and THIS WORLD (*kosmos*) – “As John Stott puts it, both words ‘express a whole social value-system which is alien to God. **It permeates, indeed dominates,**

⁴ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 76–77.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

⁵ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 77.

non-Christian society and holds people in captivity. Wherever human beings are being dehumanized—by political oppression or bureaucratic tyranny, by an outlook that is secular (repudiating God), amoral (repudiating absolutes), or materialistic (glorifying the consumer market), by poverty, hunger, or unemployment, by racial discrimination or by any form of injustice—there we can detect the sub-human values of “this age” and “this world”.¹⁶

Verse 2 on THE TWO SPIRITS – The old life, without the energizing of God (see 1:11 and 20) is subject to the energizing (Gk. *energountos*) of the powers of evil, controlled by *the spirit* which has the evil one as its source. **For a person’s inner life must be surrendered to the working of God or to that of the powers of evil (cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27; Acts 5:4; and especially see Luke 11:24–26).** And if people are surrendered to the power of evil, they become those whose habit of life is contrary to the living God, and so they are rightly called *the sons of disobedience* (cf. 5:8).⁷

Verse 3 – FOLLOWING INSTINCTS AND FALSE IDEAS - The apostle has begun to speak of Gentiles, but now he changes to the first person (see on 1:11) and so includes himself and *all* his people as *among* the children of disobedience (cf. Rom. 2:1–9; 3:9, 23). **As Caird puts it, ‘Paul the Pharisee would have hotly denied that the Jew was in these respects on a level with the Gentile ..., but Paul the Christian had come to see that the possession of the law of Moses was no protection against *desires of body and mind*, i.e. the promptings of instincts and false ideas.’⁸**

Verse 3 – THE FLESH – “The old way of life was a life in sin and disobedience following *the passions of our flesh*. The word ‘**flesh**’, as used in the New Testament, signifies in the first place simply the matter of the body, not inherently evil—the Word of God could become flesh (John 1:14). **Then it could be used to speak of the whole lower nature of man, apart from the regenerating and sanctifying Spirit of God.** The biblical phrase ‘the lusts of the flesh’, as it is often translated, is not to be taken in too narrow a sense, but as **the longings and impulses of the self-centred life (cf. Rom. 8:4–9; Gal. 5:16–21).** Apart from their restoration to God and the indwelling of God’s Spirit, men and women are not only dominated by self-centred passions, but found actually *following the desires of body and mind*. The last word translates the plural of a word more commonly used in the singular (*dianoia*) meaning a ‘thought’ or

¹ Stott, p. 73.

⁶ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 77–78.

⁷ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 78.

⁸ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 78.

‘purpose’, or ‘intelligence’. **It signifies clearly that the effects in human life of evil and selfishness are not limited to the emotions but embrace intellect and reasoning processes as well (cf. Col. 1:21).**”⁹

Verse 3 – ALL OF US ARE SUBJECT TO SIN – *By nature* often refers to what is **innate**, to what a person is by heredity (Rom. 2:27; 11:24; Gal. 2:15), but this is not always the case. Romans 2:14, for example, shows that **it can mean what people are by the habitual practices of their lives, what they are if left to themselves, not necessarily because of the inborn nature**. So NEB takes it here, ‘In our natural condition we, like the rest, lay under the dreadful judgement of God.’ Furthermore, it is asked whether what is logically prior—if ‘transmitted guilt’ was intended—would be set thus at the end. Instead the regular biblical order is seen—human sin, in thought and in action, and in consequence the wrath of God. In fact, we have here in just a few clauses a summing up of Paul’s great treatment of sin and its consequences in Romans 1–3. Jew and Gentile alike have sinned against the light and the law that they have possessed and known, and so ‘all the world’ is ‘brought under the judgement of God’ (Rom. 3:19, RV).¹⁰

Verse 4 – GOD BROKE IN – “**Such was the plight of all mankind. But God broke in.** We have what John Stott speaks of as ‘a mighty adversative’. Set against ‘the desperate condition of fallen mankind’ we have ‘the gracious initiative and sovereign action of God’. The subject of the verb has waited from the beginning of the chapter to this point. The verb waits till the next verse, till Paul in his usual manner (cf. 1:17; 3:9, 15–16), having mentioned the name of God, speaks in glowing terms of his goodness and grace. **He is not only merciful, showing his pity to those who are totally unworthy and undeserving; he is rich in mercy (see on 1:7). That mercy proceeds from love, the great love with which he loved us.** There is longing in the heart of God for humanity—the **us now means Jews and Gentiles alike**—to be restored to the highest and best that he had planned for them (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10); and so he has shown himself full of mercy, and has acted in grace towards them.”¹¹

Verse 5 – GOD MADE US ALIVE – “But before the apostle describes the action of the love of God, he resumes the object and emphasizes once again our human condition and desperate

⁹ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 79.

NEB New English Bible, NT 1961, ²1970; OT 1970.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

¹⁰ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 79–80.

¹¹ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 80.

need. **His love reached down to us** *even when we were dead through our trespasses* (cf. Rom. 5:6, 8), and he *made us alive together with Christ*. We have seen that new life, and nothing less, was needed. By his death and resurrection he did no less than bring ‘life and immortality to light’ (2 Tim. 1:10). For in his death he suffered for sin, and removed the barrier to fellowship with God that sin caused, and by his resurrection he showed his triumph over death, physical and spiritual.”¹²

Verse 6 – OUR CITIZENSHIP IS NOW IN HEAVEN – ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN - Now he says more specifically that our life has come to be there, enthroned with Christ. If this is not explicitly stated elsewhere in the Pauline letters, the meaning is implicit in such a passage as Colossians 3:1–3. Humanity, by virtue of Christ’s conquest of sin and death and by his exaltation, is lifted ‘from the deepest hell to heaven itself’ (Calvin). **Citizenship is now in heaven (Phil. 3:20); and there, and not under the limits imposed by the world, nor in conformity to its standards (Rom. 12:2), true life is found.**¹³

Verse 7 – The purpose of God for his church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and the re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. **The church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ.**¹⁴

Verse 7 – KINDNESS - Once more there are shown to be *riches* of grace, the true eternal wealth (see on 1:7), *immeasurable*, exceeding, abounding, overflowing riches (the participle has been used of the power of God in 1:19) displayed towards mankind in Christ. That grace, moreover, is expressed *in kindness* (*chrēstotēs*), a word that denotes love in action (cf. Rom. 2:4; 11:22; Titus 3:4), **personal pity and help rendered where it was needed most.**¹⁵

Verse 8 – GOD’S IS THE GIFT – Anxious to emphasize with crystal clarity the nature of this faith and the nature of grace, Paul, by his qualifying phrases in this verse and the next, excludes the possibility of anyone obtaining this salvation by any merit or self-effort. Firstly he adds to his statement of salvation by grace through faith the words *and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God*. Sometimes this has been taken to refer to faith itself being only possible by God’s gift. If we take it this way, we would need to regard the second part of verse 8 as a parenthesis,

¹² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 80.

¹³ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.

¹⁴ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82.

¹⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 83.

since verse 9 must refer to the salvation and not to faith. It seems better, however, especially in the light of the parallelism between verse 8 and verse 9 (*not your own doing ... 'not because of works'*) to take all the qualifying clauses as simply emphasizing salvation by grace. **What the apostle wants to say is that the whole initiative and every aspect of the making available of this salvation is God's. 'God's is the gift' is the rendering that shows best the emphasis of the word order in the Greek.** 'Let a man be abandoned by God, and he is absolutely hopeless. It is the voice of God that arouses, that awakens, that causes a man to think and enquire; it is the power of God that gives strength to act; it is the same power which makes provision for the need of the new life.'^{3 16}

Verse 10 – WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP - "The work of God in Christ has been described as the gift of new life, and as the gift of salvation. Now it is shown further that people of themselves could not accomplish it by its being described as God's new creation. **We, in this new life, this new nature that we have received, are his workmanship. The Greek again gains emphasis by the word order, as it makes the his stand first in the sentence.** The noun used (*poiēma*) is from a different root to the 'works' (*ergon*) of the previous verse, and is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Romans 1:20, where it is used of the works of God's first creation. Humanity was his making at the first, and now, because that work of his was spoilt by sin, there is a new divine act of creation."¹⁷

Verse 10 – WORKS IN THE NEW LIFE – 'Works' have been excluded as a means of amassing merit and gaining favour with God. The gulf between God and sinful humanity must be bridged by God's action. **The new life in fellowship with God must be God's creation and cannot be our work. But nevertheless the essential quality of the new life is good works.** The preposition here (Gk. *epi*, AV 'unto', RV and RSV *for*) shows that more is involved than saying that good works were the purpose of the new life, or that people were redeemed in order to be a people 'zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:14; cf. Col. 1:10); **rather it is that good works are 'involved' in the new life 'as an inseparable condition' (Abbott).** His new creation must be

³ C. Brown, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary* (London, 1911), p. 48.

¹⁶ Francis Foulkes, [Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 83–84.

¹⁷ Francis Foulkes, [Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 84–85.

AV Authorized Version (King James), 1611.

RV Revised Version, 1881.

RSV Revised Standard Version, NT 1946, ²1971; OT 1952.

spoken of as being ‘in true righteousness and holiness’ (Eph. 4:24). It is of such a kind that it must and will express itself in this way.¹⁸

¹⁸ Francis Foulkes, [*Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 85.