

Our Transformation in Christ

LIFE IN CHRIST #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - October 4, 2026 - Ephesians 2:1-10

INTRO: Good morning church! Today, we're in **part 3** of our series entitled, "**LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians.**" We're spending 6-weeks going through the first 3 chapters, then we'll take a break for the holidays and come back to it in 2027, Lord willing, to finish up the last 3 chapters.

The key phrase in Ephesians is "in Christ." Paul uses some form of this phrase 36 times in his letter. Ephesians divides naturally into two parts: Our position in Christ (propositional) and Our practice in Christ (prescriptive). Ephesians tells us that the Christian life is not merely life *for Christ* or life *like Christ*. It is **life in Christ**.

The apostle Paul knew Ephesus well. He had spent three years ministering there around A.D. 52–55, longer than he ministered in any other city. Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of the Roman world, with an approximate population of 250,000. Located on the western coast of Asia Minor, it became an important center of Christian influence. Timothy later ministered there, and according to early Christian tradition, so did the apostle John.

Paul wrote Ephesians around A.D. 61–62 while under house arrest in Rome during his first Roman imprisonment.

In the first chapter, Paul wrote of the blessings believers have in Christ and of his prayer that the Ephesian believers would have the "eyes of their hearts enlightened" to know what belonged to them in Christ.

Now, as we begin chapter 2, Paul turns from what we have in Christ to what happened to us when we came to Christ. And to understand how great our salvation really is, Paul first takes us back and reminds us of what we were before Christ.

Need: Most people think of themselves as basically good people who need a little improvement. We may admit that we have some bad habits, some weaknesses, some things we need to work on. So we imagine Christianity as God helping us become a better version of ourselves.

But that is not how the Bible describes our condition apart from Christ. Paul doesn't say we were spiritually sick and needed medicine. He doesn't say we were spiritually weak and needed strength. He says we were dead and needed life.

The gospel is not about self-improvement. It is about resurrection. Christianity is not God taking bad people and making them a little better. It is God taking spiritually dead people and making them spiritually alive with Christ.

Trans: That means none of us can boast. If there has been any real transformation in our lives, the glory belongs to God. We were dead, but God made us alive, enslaved to sin, but God saved us by grace.

BODY: In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he taught believers how God had transformed their lives from death to life in Christ Jesus. We can understand how God transforms our lives from death to life in Christ. How can we understand our transformation in Christ? The text gives three truths for understanding our transformation in Christ.

Read text: Ephesians 2:1-10 (ESV) ¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT OUR TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST:

1. We are spiritually dead in our sins without Christ.

EXP: (1-3) Paul begins with the darkest possible diagnosis: "you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" (1). Spiritual death does not mean inactive. Paul says they are very active. They "walk," "follow," "live," and carry out desires. But they are spiritually unresponsive to and separated from God's life.

Paul describes three enslaving influences that shape life apart from Christ:

- 1) **The world:** "following the course of this world" (2)
- 2) **The devil:** "following the prince of the power of the air" (2)
- 3) **The flesh:** "the passions of our flesh" (3)

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And then Paul moves from “you” (2) to “we all” (3). This is not merely the condition of pagan Ephesus. It is the universal human condition apart from Christ. We are “by nature children of wrath” (3). Our problem is not merely bad behavior. Our problem is our fallen nature under the righteous judgment of God.

“**You were dead**” (1) (νεκρός, *nekros*) - dead; metaphor for spiritually dead.

“**Trespasses**” (1) (παράπτωμα, *paraptōma*) - to fall beside, a lapse. More than an accidental mistake.

“**You once walked**” (2) (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) - to walk; metaphor for “way of life.”

“**World**” (2) (κόσμος, *kosmos*) - world, the prevailing values, attitudes, and patterns of this fallen age

“**Prince...of the air**” (2) (ἄρχων, *archōn*) - a ruler. Satan as the ruler of the present evil spiritual order. His authority is real but limited and temporary, always subordinate to God’s sovereignty.

“**The spirit now at work**” (2) (ἐνεργέω, *energeō*) - so the evil one is a spirit, working evil in the world.

“**Sons of disobedience**” (2) - A Hebrew expression meaning those characterized by disobedience.

“**Passions**” (3) (ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*) - desire, craving, desire for what is forbidden, lust. “Over-desire.”

“**Carrying out the desires**” (3) (θέλημα, *thelēma*) - what one wishes, the will. Sin involves more than sensuality; our thinking itself is affected by the fall. Our sinful desire affect body and mind.

“**By nature children of wrath**” (3) (ὀργή, *orgē*) - anger, wrath. People who stand under and deserve God’s righteous judgment. “By nature” means deeper than sinful behavior. Sinful nature under God’s judgement.

“**Like the rest of mankind**” (3) (λοιπός, *loipos*) - Lit., “the rest.” Mankind is implied. All humanity.

ARG: We are all sinners. Sin means to “miss the mark” or to fall short.

Romans 3:10-12, 23 (ESV) As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

The wages of sin is death.

Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death...

ILL: A dead battery can be recharged. A broken machine can be repaired. A sick person can recover. But a corpse cannot improve itself. Imagine telling a dead person: “You just need to try harder. Make some better choices. Turn over a new leaf.” The absurdity is obvious.

APP: We must be careful not to minimize the seriousness of sin. Christianity is not behavior modification. Spiritually dead people do not need a motivational speech. They need resurrection.

This also destroys spiritual pride. We cannot look down on unbelievers as though we are somehow better. Paul says, “we all once lived” this way. We’re like beggars who’ve found the bread line.

2. We are made spiritually alive with Christ.

EXP: (4-7) V.4 contains two of the greatest words in Scripture: “But God.” We were dead, but God acted. Paul does not say, “But we tried harder,” or “But we finally figured things out.” Salvation begins with “But God.”

Why did He act? Because He is “rich in mercy” and because of “the great love with which he loved us.”

When did He act? “Even when we were dead in our trespasses.” (5)

Then Paul piles up three actions of God:

1) He made us alive together with Christ. (5)

2) He raised us up with Christ. (6)

3) He seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (6)

Our salvation is inseparably joined to Christ’s resurrection and exaltation. What God did for Him becomes the basis of what God does for us.

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V.7 gives God's purpose: throughout the coming ages, He will continually display to us the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness in Christ. Heaven will not be the end of discovering God's grace. Eternity will be an unending discovery of the riches of God's immeasurable grace!

"Rich in mercy" (4) (ἔλεος, *eleos*) - mercy: kindness or good will.

"Great love" (4) (πολλὴν ἀγάπην, *pollēn agapēn*) - many, much, great unconditional love

"Made us alive together with" (5) (συζωοποιέω, *suzōopoieō*) - From σύν and ζωοποιέω: to make one alive together. The next three "together withs" all have the prefix σύν in common.

"By grace" (5, 8) (χάρις, *charis*) - good will, loving-kindness, favor, grace. The objective basis for salvation.

"You have been saved" (5, 8) (ἐστε σεσωσμένοι, *este sesosmenoi*) - A periphrastic perfect: The present tense verb "are" followed by the perfect participle "having been saved." KJV - "by grace ye are saved." This unusual verb combo leads us to see three phases of our salvation:

JUSTIFICATION: We have been saved from sin's penalty.

SANCTIFICATION: We are being saved from sin's power.

GLORIFICATION: We will be saved from sin's presence.

"Raised us up with him" (6) (συνεγείρω, *sunegeirō*) - to raise together, to cause to raise with Christ.

"Seated us with him" (6) (συγκαθίζω, *sugkathizō*) - to cause to sit down together with Christ.

"Heavenly places" (6) (ἐπουράνιος, *epouranios*) - existing in heaven; things that take place in heaven

"Immeasurable riches" (7) (ὑπερβάλλω, *hyperballō*) - to throw over or beyond, surpass, exceed, excel

"Grace in kindness" (7) (χρηστότης, *chrēstotēs*) - usefulness, excellence, gentleness, kindness.

ARG: **We were spiritually dead in sin, but God has made us alive with Christ.**

Colossians 2:13 (ESV) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses

Baptism is a picture of our old life being buried and our new life being raised with Christ.

Romans 6:4 (ESV) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

ILL: **Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9.** Saul's crippled grandson came before David with nothing to offer and every reason to fear judgment. Yet David showed him unmerited favor, restored what he had lost, and gave him a permanent seat at the king's table. That's grace.

APP: Some believers still try to live as though Christianity depends entirely on their own strength. But our new life comes from God and is sustained by our union with Christ. So when we feel trapped by our past, defeated by sin, or spiritually weak, we must remember: we are no longer who we were. We have been made alive with Christ. Our identity is no longer rooted in our failure, our past, or our performance. It is rooted in Christ.

3. We are God's workmanship in Christ.

EXP: (8-10) Now Paul returns to his parenthetical statement in v.5 "—by grace you have been saved—" but he adds its subjective means: "through faith" (8). Grace is the objective basis for our salvation and faith the subjective means or conduit of its reception. "And this (salvation) is not your own doing." It's a gift of God!

Then **v.10** gives the balance: "For we are his workmanship." We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. The Greek word is *poiēma*, the origin of the word "poem." It means something made, crafted, or produced. We are God's handiwork. His masterpiece.

And notice the language of new creation: "created in Christ Jesus for good works." God not only saves us from something. He saves us for something. The same passage that destroys boasting also gives believers purpose.

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"Through faith" (5, 8) (πίστις, *pistis*) - conviction of the truth, belief; trust in.

"This is not your own doing" (8) (τοῦτο, *touto*, *neuter*) - this, that. Does not grammatically point to "faith" alone or "grace" alone, both of which are feminine. It refers to the whole preceding clause on salvation.

"Gift of God" (8) (δῶρον, *dōron*) - a gift, present, offering. Not earned, but given as gift.

"Not a result of works" (9) (ἔργον, *ergon*) - to work; toil, labor.

"So that no one may boast" (9) (καυχάομαι, *kauchaomai*) - to boast, glory in.

"We are his workmanship" (10) (ποίημα, *poiēma*) - that which has been made; a work. Though this is where we get the English word "poem," workmanship, handiwork, or created work is more precise.

"Created in Christ Jesus" (10) (κτίζω, *ktizō*) - to create, as in Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning God created..."

"For good works" (10) (ἀγαθός, *agathos*) - useful, salutary; good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy

"Prepared beforehand" (10) (προετοιμάζω, *proetomazō*) - to prepare before, to ordain before

"That we should walk in them" (10) (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) - same as v.2, but now live out good works.

ARG: God saved us by His grace and mercy, not our own works.

Titus 3:4-7 (ESV) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...

Jesus redeemed us to be His own people, on fire for serving Him.

Titus 2:14 (ESV) [Jesus] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

ILL: If you walk through an art gallery, the name beside the painting matters. A canvas by Rembrandt or Picasso is valued not merely because of the paint and canvas, but because of who created it. The same is true in a bookstore. The author's name on the cover tells you something about the quality of the work.

Paul says, "We are God's workmanship." Our worth is not based on being self-made, but in the fact that God is the One who made us new in Christ. His name is on His work.

APP: Don't ask, "What must I do to earn God's acceptance?" Christ has already accomplished what was necessary for our salvation. But having been saved, we can ask, "Lord, what have You prepared for me to do? I'm your workmanship. What's your purpose for my life?"

CONCLUSION: We were dead in our sins, following the world, the flesh, and the devil, unable to save ourselves.

But God! God being rich in mercy and great in love, sent His Son. Jesus took our sin and judgment upon Himself at the cross. He died, was buried, and rose again. And when we place our faith in Him, God makes us alive with Christ, raises us with Christ, and gives us a whole new life in Christ.

This is grace. We did not earn it. We cannot boast in it. Salvation is the gift of God.

And now, having saved us, God is still at work in us. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for the good works He has already prepared for us.

So remember who you were without Christ. Rejoice in what God has done for you in Christ. And walk in the new life He has prepared for you.

And if you are still dead in your sins, hear the good news today: Jesus is alive, and He can make you alive in Him.

Let's pray.