

# ***“Before and After”***

**EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

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If you have kept up with the news over the past week or so, then you that there has been some controversy over a fitness blogger who posted a picture of herself on Instagram along with her three children. I don't have it up here, but if you have seen it, then you know that the picture shows her in amazing shape surrounded by her three children, and the caption says, "What's your excuse?" Well, as you can imagine, a lot of people got upset and came out with the criticism, basically saying that this woman was bragging and making everybody feel guilty for not being in as good of shape as she is. But just the fact that this argument has gone on for a week or so now shows that we as Americans have quite an interest in how the human body changes over time, how the human body reacts to the effects of stress and time.

Most of you have probably seen the pictures of various presidents through the years, showing the aging process and the effects of stress on the human body. We have pictures of all of the presidents going back at least 150 years, and the effects of mental strain and anguish on the human body are obvious.

We look at our own president right now, and even after one term, we can see the toll that the stress of leadership can take on a person's physical condition. Those of you who were with us last week might remember the encouragement to pray for our leaders. Instead of cursing the king, the Bible tells us to pray, and there is a reason for that. Most of us will never feel that kind of weight placed on our shoulders.

Sometimes, though, there are some situations where people seem to look a little bit better with age. Several days ago, I ran across a website full of pictures of various actors and actresses who have supposedly improved over time. We may or may not agree on all of these, but I think we have the idea that all of us have a way of changing – sometimes for the worse and sometimes for the better. I don't want to just pick on the presidents or celebrities, so I should also show you a picture of me that was printed on a flyer that somebody found while cleaning out a cabinet several weeks ago. This was taken about 13 years ago. I look at this picture, and I compare it to what you see standing before you today, and I think to myself, "Look at what you people have done to me!" The point is, all of us have a way of changing over time. Of course, I am sure you are thinking that I have only grown more handsome and have begun to look more wise with age!

This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 2 as we consider one of the most powerful passages on the subject of GRACE and the change that takes place in our lives when we obey the gospel.

Studying this passage in sermon form is a first for me, and in a way I find that hard to believe, and yet as I got into it over this past week, I very quickly realized that this passage is very deep. In fact, it is one of those passages that are hard to take in. It is almost too big. I think of the feeling I get when I open the menu at Laredo's – there is so much there, there is so much fine print, I can hardly focus, the task of soaking it in is too much to handle, even to the point where I am almost paralyzed by all of the possibilities. And I know, I hate to compare a passage of scripture to a menu, but that is the way I have felt this week. The passage is too big to truly appreciate in a week of study, let alone in a 30-minute sermon.

This morning, then, I would invite you to open this passage with me, and if I could present another picture, I would love to serve as your tour guide. Imagine that we are on a whale-watching tour. We head out into the ocean on our little tour boat, and we pull up alongside a giant whale. For a few minutes, I can say, "Look, there it is!" I can perhaps tell you a little bit about it, but it is truly impossible to fully know and to truly understand the depth and the beauty of what we are looking at in such a short amount of time. And yet there is a value to looking at it and being amazed, even if only for a short time.

If you will, then, please look with me at Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul is writing this letter to the church at Ephesus, the church where the young man Timothy was serving as the evangelist. In chapter 1, he outlines some of the amazing blessings they have as a result of being "*in Christ*," and then, as he makes that point, he paints a clear contrast in Chapter 2 – this is how you were before you obeyed the gospel, and this is how you are now, after you have obeyed the gospel. Notice, please, Ephesians 2:1-10,

***And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.***

So, we see in this passage a contrast – for us as Christians, at least, Paul is pointing out the way we were as opposed to the way we are now.

**I. And, notice, Paul starts out in the opening verses with THE WAY WE WERE.**

And we might think: That is a pretty callous thing to do! We might think: That's not nice! After all, these things are in the past. These things have been forgiven. Why, then, does Paul do this? Why does Paul dredge up the past? Why does Paul show us the BEFORE picture? I think we understand he does this so that we never forget and so that we truly appreciate the blessings we have in Christ. Think of those weight loss commercials: To really appreciate the "after" picture, we need to see the way things were "before." And with that in mind, Paul starts in right away in verse 1 with a reminder.

**A. Notice, first of all, that before we obeyed the gospel, we were DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES AND SINS.**

And so the “before” picture is not very flattering, to say the least! In fact, it doesn’t get much worse than “*dead*.” Without Christ, before we obeyed the gospel, we were spiritually “*dead*.” Some of us enjoy some of the CSI-type shows that have been on TV for quite a few years now, and we know that a huge part of many of those shows is determining a cause of death. We think about NCIS, one of the most popular shows on TV right now, and we think about the role of Dr. Mallard, or Ducky. Ducky’s job is to find out what happened. What is the cause of death? Often, the cause of death is the key to the whole mystery. And if that is true physically, it is also true spiritually. What is the cause of spiritual death? Paul says that the cause of spiritual death is sin. We were “*dead in our trespasses and sins*.”

As we have discussed many times before, a “*transgression*” is what happens when we step across a line that God has told us not to cross. If we are out in the woods and see a sign nailed to a fence that says “No Trespassing,” and if we step across that line, we have trespassed. In spiritual terms, we have basically said to God, “God, I don’t care what you say, I am going to do it anyway. A transgression is what happens when we cross the line.

The word “*sin*” that Paul uses here is the other word, the word that refers to “missing the mark.” And again, we have also discussed this word several times through the years, but the word carries the idea of taking careful aim at a target, and yet despite our best efforts, from time to time we will miss. And that’s the way it is with sin. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we miss, we fail, the arrow (or whatever it is) doesn’t hit the target as we intended. So, I think you can see that there is some difference between a sin and a transgression, but the bottom line is: Sin causes spiritual death. And that is where we were before we obeyed the gospel. We were dead in our trespasses and sins.

Often, people will think of sin as a rather insignificant little problem. They think of sin in terms of mistakes that God will overlook. They think of sin like a 3-year old might look at knocking over the vase on the kitchen table. If you just claim that it was an accident, then everything will be okay. But that is not what sin is. Sin is crossing the line. Sin is missing the mark. And the result of sin is spiritual death. As I understand it, death simply refers to a separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death, though, is the separation of the soul from God. Sin takes us away from God. As we have discussed before, kind of like what might happen if you steal my car. If you steal my car, and if I know you’re the one who did it, we have a problem. And it’s not my problem, it’s your problem. You have done something to break our relationship. And that’s the way it is with God. When we sin, we have a problem with God. When we sin, we die spiritually. Sin separates us from God. When we sin, we die. And that is what Paul is talking about here. At one point (before we obeyed the gospel), we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

**B. Secondly, we notice in this passage that in addition to being dead, we were also DISOBEDIENT.**

Notice in verse 2, when it comes to those sins from verse 1, we “*formerly walked according to the course of this world*.” So, we were dead, but we were also walking. What does that make us? It makes us the walking dead! And if you are familiar with that show, then you know: That is not a pretty picture! We don’t want to be the walking dead, but that is what we were. We were dead in sin, and we were walking in disobedience. We were walking “*according to the course of this world*.” In other words, we were walking just like everybody else in this world was walking. We were walking in disobedience. According to verse 2, we were using the world as our guide. We were using the world as our standard. We think of the excuse that many of us gave to

our parents when we were teenagers, “But mom, but dad, everybody else is doing it!” Of course, it doesn’t matter what everybody else is doing, what matters is what God wants us to do. Anything else is disobedient.

Notice how Paul says that in this disobedience, we were walking “*according to the prince of the power of the air.*” Did you catch that? You might remember from our study on angels several weeks ago, Satan is described as the prince of this world, the idea going back to the idea that Satan seems to be some kind of archangel who rebelled against God and was removed from heaven. Satan, then, still has some level of influence, and when we walk in disobedience, we are walking according to his power. But the key here is that before we obeyed the gospel, we were disobedient. Our lives were characterized by not obeying God. We were rebellious.

**C. In verse 3, we come to a third description here as Paul describes us as basically being ENSLAVED TO SELFISHNESS.**

Notice: Paul says that we “*formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*” We were living by the flesh. We were making decisions based only on what felt good at the time. And of course, as we did this, we thought that we were free, that we were only doing what was best for us. And yet, in reality, we were not free at all. Instead, we were enslaved to ourselves. We were ruled by passion and desire. We think about getting angry, for example, if we are living by passion, we might just blow up at somebody. Maybe we yell, maybe we cut loose with some cutting remark against another person, perhaps we use profanity, maybe we even lash out physically, maybe we throw something across the room. There is no control. We just do what we feel like we need to do in the heat of the moment. We might think we have the freedom to do these things, and in a sense we do, but that is not real freedom. In reality, we are enslaved to our own selfishness. If we were left to do whatever we wanted to do, we would end up in slavery. Two weeks ago, we talked about something as simple as the food that we eat. We think about alcohol. We think about intimate relationships. Without God’s law, even things that were created to be good can end up as wicked masters over us.

Sometimes as Christians, the farther we get away from that moment we obeyed the gospel, the more difficult it becomes to see how bad things really were. Before obeying the gospel, we were dead, we were disobedient, and we were enslaved to our own selfishness.

**D. With that in mind, we notice one more detail concerning our former way of life – it comes right at the end of verse 3 as we see that before Christ we were CHILDREN OF WRATH, in other words, WE WERE DOOMED, WE WERE LOST IN THAT CONDITION.**

The wrath Paul is talking about here is God’s wrath, God’s wrath against sin. When it comes to God’s wrath, many people are mistaken in one of two very different directions. On one hand, many think that God isn’t a God of wrath. Many think that the God of wrath is from the Old Testament, but that the God of the New Testament is only a God of love, that the God we know today would never punish sin. On the other hand, some look at this subject and look at God as being only vengeful and mean, that God is only concerned that we never have any fun down here. So, either God is only warm and fuzzy, or God is just always flying off the handle at stuff. Neither position is true. From the scriptures, we find that the wrath of God is consistent, always fair, and always right. God doesn’t go around losing His temper, but His wrath is always a measured response to sin. God is perfect in every way and cannot allow sin in His presence. And so, when the line is crossed, when the target is missed, we become “*children of wrath.*” We become lost in sin and subject to God’s punishment.

At this point, being dead, walking in disobedience, enslaved to our own passions and desires, now sitting here as children of wrath, that puts us in a tough spot. At this point, we are clearly in the “before” category. Something is wrong. Something needs to be done. We cannot fix this on our own.

Before we move on, I would just ask: Is this the way we saw ourselves before we obeyed the gospel? If you have not yet obeyed the gospel, is this the way you see yourself this morning? For those of us who are Christians, is this the way we see our friends and neighbors and fellow students who are outside of Christ? The word of God tells us that those outside of Christ are dead, disobedient, enslaved, and deserving of God’s wrath. If we understand this, it changes the way we look at things. We see that we need to do something with this information. With an understanding of where we have been, we see the need for telling people what to do. We look at the world in a completely different way. Outside of Christ, all people who sin are subject to the wrath of God. That’s the “before” picture.

**II. Thankfully, though, the transition comes in verse 4 as we move over into the SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.**

In verse 4, Paul starts by saying, **“But God...,”** and with that, he refers to God who is **“rich in mercy.”** When I think of someone who is **“rich,”** I think of someone who has a lot of something, and we find here that God is **“rich in mercy.”** God has a lot of mercy. Then, Paul goes on to speak of God’s **“great love”** for us. Not just love, but **“great love.”** At the beginning of verse 4, then, the word **“but”** signals the transition from the before to the after. We were subject to God’s wrath, but then God got involved in the process – God, who is **“rich in mercy”** and full of **“great love.”** And with that, Paul starts to describe the change that takes place when we obey the gospel, when we accept the good news.

**A. Notice, first of all (in verse 5), that God MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.**

We have a picture here of the new birth. We were dead, but God made us alive. This is what the Lord was talking about when he told Nicodemus that he must be **“born again”** (John 3:3). And I would emphasize here that the focus is on God: God is the one who **“made us alive.”** We didn’t make ourselves alive, but God **“made us alive.”** Have you ever thought about the fact that we are pretty much passive in the act of baptism? We believe in Jesus (that’s something we do), we turn away from our sins (that’s something we do), we confess that Jesus is the Son of God (that’s something we do), but we “are baptized.” Notice: The Bible never tells us to go baptize ourselves, but baptism is something that happens to us. Yes, we choose to do it, but it is something that is done to us. And I find that so interesting! We do not save ourselves. In a sense, yes, we obey – we do what God has told us to do – and that is important, but in the act of baptism itself, we allow ourselves to be baptized. It is an act that is done to us. And we find in the scriptures that God is the one who is doing the actual work. We think about a passage that is very much parallel to this passage in Colossians 2:12 – a passage written by the same author, in a book that was delivered by the same man (Tychicus), and written to a congregation that was located just a few miles away from Ephesus. And in this parallel passage, we find that Paul refers to **“...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”** Notice: In baptism, we put our faith in the **“working of God.”** In baptism, we aren’t doing the work; no, God is doing the work. Through baptism, we put our faith in the **“working of God.”** The same God who raised Jesus from the dead also raises us from spiritual death. Or, as Paul says here in Ephesians 2:5, God **“made us alive together with Christ.”**

- B. In verse 6, we find something else God did for us, and that is, when we obeyed the gospel, **GOD RAISED US UP WITH CHRIST AND SEATED US WITH HIM IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS.**

So, not only were we raised out of the waters of baptism when we were made alive, but we find here that we were raised up with Christ. That means that in at least some sense, we are with Christ right now. We are not in heaven yet, but right now we are with Christ, seated with him in the heavenly places. Again, remembering that Colossians is very much parallel to the book of Ephesians, we think of our scripture reading this morning from the opening verses of Colossians 3, ***“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*** So again, we are obviously not in heaven yet, but Paul tells us that when we were raised up with Christ, our lives were ***“hidden with Christ in God.”*** Because God is rich in mercy and because of God’s great love, our citizenship is now in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

- C. There is another aspect of the “after” picture in verses 8-9 as we find that we are **SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.**

The word ***“grace”*** goes back to a word meaning “gift.” Salvation, then, is not earned or deserved in any way, but it is a gift from God. And we find out here that we have been given salvation ***“through faith.”*** We might say that faith is how we accept God’s offer of salvation. I might define faith here as belief expressed through obedience. God showed Noah mercy by warning him about the impending flood (the Bible says as much in Genesis 6, that Noah found ***“grace/favor”*** in the eyes of God). Noah’s faith in that warning caused him to build an ark. Hebrews 11:7 says that, ***“By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”*** God extended grace to Naaman the Leper by telling him what to do to be cured. Naaman’s faith caused him to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River, just as he was instructed. The crossing of the Red Sea was also a miraculous gift from God. In no way did the Israelites earn that, and yet they did have to actually put one foot in front of the other and walk across the sea on dry ground. As the Bible says in Hebrews 11:29, ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land.”*** Their faith caused them to walk, but God is the One who provided the miracle. The fall of Jericho was also a gift from God. The people of Israel demonstrated their faith by marching around the city just as God had told them to do. In the words of Hebrews 11:30, ***“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.”*** God dropped the walls, but the people had to walk. Their faith had to be demonstrated through obedience.

Some have looked at verses 8-9, though, and they have tried to say that if we actually “do” anything in terms of salvation, that means that we have worked, that we have therefore done something to earn our salvation. But I would ask: Did Noah earn a spot on the ark? Could Naaman brag about healing himself from leprosy? Did the Israelites destroy Jericho with their amazing military power? Could the Israelites brag about what a good job they did crossing the Red Sea? No! In the same way, salvation is God’s gift. We accept the gift by doing what God has told us to do, but in no way do we ever earn or deserve our salvation. As Paul says, we are saved by grace through faith.

- D. I would point out one more aspect of our lives after our obedience to the gospel, and that is (as Paul says in verse 10): **WE ARE GOD’S WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS.**

As I look at verse 10, I see two parts of this. First of all, we are God's workmanship. The idea is: We are God's creation. The word here is the word for POEM. We are God's poem. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in Romans 1:20 where Paul speaks of the universe and refers to the **"things that are made."** The universe is God's poem, and here we learn that we as Christians are also described as God's poem. And the idea is: When God sees us as Christians, he sees something that he has made. Just as Juanita might take a piece of fabric and some thread and turn it into something beautiful, just as Gary might take a sheet of stainless steel and turn it into something practical, just as David might take some raw materials and the sketch on the back of a napkin and create a battery, so also God takes what is dead, disobedient, enslaved, and doomed, and he transforms us into his children. He takes broken hearts and lives and very skillfully creates useful members of his kingdom. We are his workmanship, his craftsmanship.

And that leads us to the second part of being God's workmanship: We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. In other words, we have been made Christians for a purpose, for a reason. And the reason is: So that we would walk in good works. In a sense, then, we are almost like tools. God made us and placed us in his kingdom to do stuff. I think of some of the tools out in my garage. Some tools can be used for a wide variety of things – a hammer, a screwdriver, a razor blade. But other tools are very specialized. I have some tools that are very specific – there is the spark plug wrench that only fits my old roto-tiller – it is just the right size and has that little rubber boot thing in the back of it for grabbing the plug as it comes out. I only use that tool maybe once every two years, but it has a purpose, and I couldn't do what I need to do without it. In the same way, we also have a purpose. We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. As Christians, we have a mission. We have been created to do good. And that right there is an amazing part of the "after" picture.

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would ask those of us who are Christians: Do we really appreciate how bad it was before we obeyed the gospel? To really appreciate our own salvation, I believe we need to think about that sometimes. And while we're at it, let's remember that we have been made alive, raised up and saved by grace through faith for a reason, and the reason is: Good works! Let us think of ways to do good this week. Doing good is our reason for living!

And then for those here this morning who have not yet obeyed the gospel: This is how bad it is. You might not feel very dead (I don't know), but before we are buried with Christ in baptism (whether we realize it or not), we are dead, disobedient, enslaved, and doomed. Without Christ, we remain personally responsible for the death of Jesus on the cross. Like the people on Pentecost in Acts 2, we need to be cut to the heart over this. Once we realize what we have done, once we realize that we have transgressed God's law, the Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin, publicly stating our believe in Jesus as God's Son, and then we must allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism so that our sins can be forgiven. At that point, we are then raised up with Christ to live a life of service to God. Next week, I would like for us to look very carefully at the church in Ephesus, so that we can study what they actually did to obey the gospel. If you have any questions this morning, let us know, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, we would invite you to make that transition from before to after. If you are ready right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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