

## **Ephesians 2:1-10 — The Best Christmas Gift**

**December 9, 2018**

Before we begin, I want you to take a moment to think about the best Christmas gift you ever received. Some people will remember getting the keys to a car on Christmas morning. Maybe you went in the garage and there was a car with a huge bow on the hood. Some of you remember opening a small package that had a ring and your boyfriend proposed on Christmas morning. There are even some who will remember a Christmas wedding. What was the biggest and best Christmas gift in your life?

This morning, we are going to look at the best Christmas gift ever given. His name is Jesus. I know we are in church and Jesus is always the right answer. Saying that Jesus is the best Christmas gift ever given can sound trite, but it is true. This morning, we are going to find out why.

We are in an Advent series in the book of Ephesians called, “The Gift of the Son.” Today, we are looking at Ephesians 2:1-10. Take out your Bibles. Turn to Ephesians 2:1. Follow along as I read the first 10 verses of the chapter.

**Ephesians 2:1-10.**

These verse break into three parts. First, they tell us who we were before the gift of Jesus. Second, they tell us what God did for us through the gift of Jesus. Third, they tell us how to live after we have the gift of Jesus.

**Before Jesus, we were spiritually dead and deserving of God’s wrath in the Lake of Fire.**

**We are dead in our sin and trespasses.**

**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...**  
**Ephesians 2:1–2 (ESV)**

This is not a popular concept. When Paul said we are dead, he didn't mean we are physically dead. Everyone starts out physically alive but when it comes to knowing God and having a relationship with him, we are dead. Notice that Paul did not say we are spiritually sick. Spiritually sick people could help themselves. We are spiritually dead. There is nothing dead people can do to help themselves. They have no life in their bodies. When it comes to knowing God, everyone on the planet starts out dead.

As a pastor, I am occasionally asked to be with a family when a loved one dies. Sometimes I am there when the undertaker arrives, the family is asked to leave, and the undertaker puts the body in a bag. Occasionally, the undertaker asks me to help get the body in the bag. I need to tell you that dead people are different. When you bump a dead person into a coffee table or hit his head into something, you want to apologize but you don't need to. Nothing happens to him. There is no reaction from him because there is zero life in him.

Paul said that when it comes to knowing the God who created the universe, we have no relationship with him and no connection with him. Spiritually, we are as lifeless as a piece of roadkill.

What killed us? Paul said we are dead in our trespasses and sins. These are similar words, but they are slightly different. Trespasses are things we choose to do wrong. Sins are things we fail to do right. A trespass means deviating from a path. It means choosing to go where we should not go. That is why we have signs that say, "No Trespassing." Trespassing is walking on your neighbor's lawn when he doesn't want you there.

Sin literally means missing a mark. It is not necessarily intentionally doing something wrong, it is just failing to do the right thing when you try to do the right thing. Sometimes people say these are like sins of commission and omission. A trespass is a sin of commission. It is choosing to do what we know is wrong. A sin is like an omission. It is failing to measure up to what we know is right.

One way to think of this is to imagine you are in your warm house watching your neighbor shovel his driveway. You tell your spouse you can't believe how someone sinned against your neighbor. Two weeks before, your neighbor left his garage open and someone trespassed on his property and stole his snowblower. Now he needs to shovel the snow. The problem is that while you are upset at the person who trespassed and stole the snow blower, the Bible tells us we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. If someone stole your snowblower, you would want some help shoveling the driveway. The right thing to do is to leave the comfort of your living room and help your neighbor in his time of need. When you don't do that, you fall short of loving your neighbor. You sin.

Now I realize these are not airtight definitions of sinning and trespassing, because these words can carry broader meanings, but the point I am making remains. Once we realize that God is not just concerned with what we go out of our way to do wrong but he is also concerned with what we fail to do right, we quickly realize we have much deeper problems with sin than we realized.

Since we are spiritually dead we can try to save ourselves but there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Dead people can't do anything to help themselves. We are in a hopeless situation.

Realizing that the Bible describes everyone before Christ as spiritually dead helps us correct some of the terminology used in modern churches today. One of the popular terms we often hear is that people without Christ are called spiritual seekers. They are seeking Jesus; they simply haven't found him. That is a gentle term to use with those who don't know Christ. The problem is that it isn't true. Nobody seeks Christ. Spiritually dead people don't seek anything. They can't seek anything. They are dead. In Romans 3, Paul told us that we cannot say anyone without Christ is a spiritual seeker.

...no one understands; no one seeks for God. Romans 3:11 (ESV)

Before Christ, we only desired sin. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said that when someone has an interest in the things of God it is not because they are seeking God. The truth is God is seeking them and is drawing them to himself.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... John 6:44 (ESV)

The problem with calling someone a spiritual seeker is it gives us too much credit. We aren't the ones who found God. We were spiritually dead. It was God who found us and made us alive.

Realizing we are spiritually dead also flies in the face of what popular culture tells us about ourselves. Culture tells us we are basically good people and we have no natural bias toward evil. Popular culture says if people simply have better education and more wealth they will not desire evil to do evil. That isn't true. The Bible says we are by nature children of wrath. All of us have a sinful nature. All tough circumstances do is reveal the death and sin that is

already in our hearts. They do not create sin and death and place them in our hearts. Tough circumstances reveal the trespasses and sin that are already in us.

Paul said those who are spiritually dead have three influences guiding their lives: The world, Satan, and our own fleshly desires. This is everyone on the planet before Christ and apart from Christ.

**We were following the world's value system.**

...in which you once walked, following the course of this world...

Have you noticed that society is organized in opposition to God? Society's values are the opposite of God's values. You see this when you want to find a movie to rent. Most movies glorify murder, deception, extramarital sex and things that are contrary to the life God desires. As Christians, it is hard to find a good movie. Have you noticed the rest of the world doesn't have a problem with Hollywood's movies? The rest of the world follows the godless entertainment offered to us. People think it is normal because they are spiritually dead. They are like dead fish. They just float down the cultural river. When Christ comes into our hearts, immediately we find ourselves thinking differently. The Holy Spirit begins convicting us about the godless values and practices of society. Instead of a being a dead fish that floats in the cultural river, we are salmon that start swimming against the current upstream!

Another example of the godless culture of the world pressing people into a mold is the way our society is pressuring people to get on board with the LGBTQ agenda. Those who don't endorse that kind of a lifestyle are considered haters and homophobes.

Some of you may have see Isabella Chow's story in the news.<sup>1</sup> She was in the student senate at the University of California Berkley. She was pressured to resign because, as a Christian, she abstained from a symbolic student vote that endorsed the LGBTQ lifestyle. Why was she pressured to resign from student government? As a Christian, she didn't agree with endorsing the LGBTQ lifestyle.

Before Christ, the value systems of the world are what directs people's lives.

**We were following the guidance of Satan.**

...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...

The Bible tells us there is a dark, evil spiritual being behind much of the abuse, tyranny, death, starvation and wickedness on the planet. His name is Satan. He has helpers called fallen angels, also known as demons. Understand that Satan is not equal in power to God. Satan was created as an angelic being but he rebelled against God.

Many people do not believe in a real, personal Satan. If you don't believe a real Satan exists, you need to know Jesus told us he exists.

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Luke 10:18 (ESV)

Jesus said Satan exists. Paul told us Satan is the prince of the power of the air. The power of the air is a way to describe the demonic world around us. Satan is in charge of that world and organizes his demons to work against God and his kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thefederalist.com/2018/11/29/isabella-chow-stood-christianity-uc-berkeley-met-onslaught/>

Most people don't realize that Satan and his demonic hordes are not watching us from a distance like we watch the Minnesota Vikings on TV. Satan and his demons are actively involved in the game of life, influencing people to live in godless ways. This is why Paul said "he is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Apart from Christ, nobody is spiritually neutral. Spiritually dead people are under Satan's influence. Satan influences some spiritually dead people more overtly, while he influences others more covertly. He influences everyone that is spiritually dead and apart from Christ. This is what the Bible teaches.

**We were following our fleshy desires.**

...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...

We learned that spiritually dead people are led by two powerful forces on the outside of their lives. They are the world's value system and Satan's influence. Then Paul talked about a powerful influence upon spiritually dead people that comes not from outside them but inside them. It is the passions of their own flesh.

When Paul talked about the passions of the flesh, the first thing many of us think about are sexual passions. While it is true that living for our sexual passions is one of the ways we live for the passions of the flesh, Paul didn't intend to limit this to just sexual passions.

By nature, people that are spiritually dead live to simply satisfy the cravings of their mind and body. These cravings are usually money, sex, and power. We live for more money. We live to get more sex. We live to get more

power. The spiritually dead are like brute beasts. They live to satisfy the cravings of their bodies and minds.

The picture of people before Christ is very bleak. We are completely dead in our sin. We have no ability to seek God and to know God. Like a dead fish floating down stream, we live to follow the values of our culture. We are puppets of Satan's influence. We are brute beasts that live to satisfy our appetites. We are in a hopeless situation.

**We were fully deserving of God's wrath.**

Paul summarized the position of everyone before Christ this way.

**...we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind...**

Before Christ, every one of us is a perfect candidate for God to display his fully justified wrath against sin and rebellion. This is everyone on the planet apart from Christ, no matter how good they may appear.

Paul summarized everyone before Christ this way in Romans.

**For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Romans 7:18 (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." Romans 3:10–12 (ESV)**

The Bible wants every one of us to feel incredibly depressed. If we aren't depressed with our state before Christ, we don't understand the truth about our state before Christ. When it seems that nothing can get worse, God's good news comes on the scene.

**Through Jesus, I am spiritually alive and seated with Christ.**

**God brought us to life through Jesus because of his mercy and love.**

...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...

God is incredibly kind. While we were fully deserving of God's wrath for our sin, God decided that to some he would demonstrate unprecedented mercy and love. While we were spiritual corpses, God made us alive with Christ. Remember we were so spiritually dead that we could not choose Christ or do anything to create a relationship or restore a relationship with him. God chose us. He made us alive together with Jesus. Just as he raised his son Jesus from physical death, he raised us from spiritual death.

How does this work? When the good news of Jesus is presented to a group of people, to some people the good news of Jesus will seem like foolishness. For other people, it will make sense. Why will it make sense to some and not to others?

Everyone that is spiritually dead will see the good news of Jesus as foolishness. Everyone that God has chosen to bring alive through his Holy Spirit will find the Word of God about Jesus making sense to them. They will respond to the good news of Jesus and trust in Jesus.

When we go to the book of Acts, this is what we see. Look what happens every time the apostles teach about Jesus.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48 (ESV)

All those that God is bringing to life because he has chosen them in eternity past will hear the good news of Jesus and respond by believing in the good news of Jesus. The reason this happens is because the response to the good news of Jesus doesn't come from us. We are dead. It comes as a supernatural work of God in our hearts to make us alive!

**The only reason we are saved is God's grace, not our goodness.**

**...by grace you have been saved...**

All of our lives with God is a gift from God. Before we chose Christ, he chose us. We were dead and had no ability to know God or the things of God.

This is what makes the Christian faith so different from other faiths. In other faiths, you decide what God looks like, then you pursue God. In the Christian faith, we didn't choose God. We were dead. God chose us! We don't make up a God that is the way we want him to look. We worship a God that is the way he reveals himself to us. Other faiths don't understand this crucial distinction. We didn't choose Christ. He chose us.

This also reminds us that since we didn't choose Christ, all those who are genuinely chosen by God will never walk away from him because their faith never began with themselves. It began with God who made them alive while they were dead. The faith that God began in our lives is the faith he will sustain in our lives.

This is why it is so important to understand the significance of what Paul meant when he said, "By grace you have been saved." Ultimately, we do nothing to save ourselves. We were dead. God made us alive. When we heard the good

news of Jesus, it made sense to us because God took our dead hearts and made them spiritually alive so we could respond to the gospel. All of our relationships with God and all of our lives with God are a gift from God. God gets all the credit. God gets all the glory.

God doesn't do 90 percent of saving us and we do 10 percent. God gets 100 percent of the credit for making us spiritually alive and drawing us to himself through Jesus.

**In heaven, we are so blessed that we sit with Jesus.**

...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Now it gets better. We are not just given spiritual life by Jesus in place of spiritual death but we are raised up to heaven and seated with Jesus in heaven. The Bible doesn't give us all the details of how this works but I think we can imaginatively understand this.

When my children were younger, I loved to have my kids sit on my lap. I would put my arms around them. I would run my fingers through their hair. I would give them a shoulder rub. They would bounce on my knee. Dad's lap was a place of honor, protection and safety. Other kids didn't sit on my lap. Only my kids sat on my lap. Only my kids could experience of the warmth, safety and love of their father's lap.

This is us. We sit on Jesus' lap in heaven. No other beings in the entire universe gets to sit on Jesus' lap. Do you realize how privileged we are to start out in a state of spiritual death fully deserving God's wrath and then to be sitting on Jesus' lap in heaven? I told you Jesus was the best Christmas present!

It gets better! The Bible tells us Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus is seated on a throne in heaven. The best way to imaginatively understand this is to tell you what happens in my house. We have a dining room table and I have the chair at the head of the dining room table. That is the place of honor. Nobody sits in Dad's chair without asking. When we have guests over to the house, people ask, "Which chair is Kurt's chair? I don't want to sit in Kurt's chair."

Think of what this tells us. We don't just sit on Jesus' lap in heaven but we get to sit with Jesus in his chair in heaven. Nobody else in the universe sits in Jesus' chair and in Jesus' lap. That is our position! We deserve none of this. We were spiritually dead, controlled by Satan, brute beasts that lived for our cravings. God chose to love us and have mercy on us. He made us alive and seated us with Christ in heaven in the place of honor. Jesus truly is the greatest Christmas gift ever given.

**In eternity, the blessings we have through Jesus keep getting better.**

...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus...

The picture is that for all of eternity, for year after year, for century after century, for millennium after millennium, into infinity, God the Father will continue to pour out more grace, kindness and love for us through Jesus. Understand that heaven is a static level of joy and blessings from God. Eternity in heaven with Jesus will be continually increasing levels of joy and blessing. It will be amazing when we arrive in heaven and are seated with Jesus in his lap and on his chair. A thousand years after we first entered heaven we will have even more happiness,

joy and blessings than the day we arrived. God has a continual improvement program for our blessings through Christ that will continue to unfold for all eternity. Can you imagine this? It is mind-blowing!

There will never be any being in all creation that will ever receive more grace, more kindness, more love, more blessing, more affection, and more of God's riches than you and me through Jesus.

For all of eternity, every angelic being in the vast uncharted spiritual world will be singing God's praises for his unmatched levels of kindness and goodness that he has given to us. God's grace to us through Jesus will never get old. It will never get boring. It will never get stale. God's grace to us through Jesus will be like a good book. You know what it is like to read a book when you finish one chapter and you can't wait to start the next? That is what it will be like for us for all eternity with Jesus.

Remember who we were before Jesus. We were spiritually dead, led by the godless values of our culture, and led by the devil and our own fleshly desires like brute beasts. We had our bags packed for an eternity in the Lake of Fire.

In God's kindness he made us alive through Jesus. He made us the most blessing beings in the universe. He seated us in the most blessed location in the universe. He promises to continue increasing his blessing and love for us throughout eternity.

That is why Jesus is the best Christmas gift.

## How should I respond to what God has done for me through Jesus, the best Christmas gift?

**Be filled with gratitude and humility.**

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

We know what we were. We know what we deserved. We know what God did for us through Jesus. God needs to get all the praise for his good work in us that we don't deserve. There is no room for pride in our lives because we are so blessed, and it is all a gift from God from his love and mercy. The only proper attitude is humility and gratitude.

This is what makes us sing loudly in church. We don't sing loudly because we like the music. We sing loudly because we love our savior and can't help but sing with gratitude and thankfulness in our hearts for all God has done for us that we don't deserve.

**Go out of your way to serve and love people.**

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

Paul said we are God's workmanship. The word workmanship is the Greek word *poemo* from which we get our English word poem. It means a work of art or a masterpiece. We are the masterpiece of God's universe. God saving us and blessing us through Jesus is God's greatest work in the universe. What God did for us through Jesus makes us the masterpiece of God's work in creation.

How should we respond? Since God in his kindness and mercy has done such a good work for us, in gratitude, we are to respond by doing good works for

others. After all the good work God has done for us, it stands to reason that we should go out of our way to do good works for others. That is especially true during this holiday season, but it is also true for the rest of the year.

## Conclusion

Jesus is truly the greatest gift every given. He takes us from death to life. He takes us from fully deserving God's eternal wrath to being made the objects of God's greatest blessing for all eternity. We did nothing to deserve any of this. It is all a gift of God to us through Jesus, his son.

I ask you, have you received Jesus, the best Christmas gift? If you have not received the gift God offers you through Jesus, you can receive him today. Before you leave, in your heart you can confess your sin to God and ask Jesus' death to pay for your sin and give you life. In that moment you will be supernaturally transformed from spiritual death to life when you receive the greatest Christmas gift.



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