



Intro video (Eph 2:1-10) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRo4Vyfqi_A

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the life and state of someone who's not a Christian believer?
2. What is your emotional response as you read v1? Why might we or our friends find this offensive?
3. What do you make of the different interlocking problems listed in v1-3? Is this how we tend to think of our (pre-Christian) selves and unbelievers we know?
4. Given what's come before, why is v4-7 such amazingly good news? What do we learn about the 'why', 'what', and 'where' of God's saving activity?
5. What do you think might be the significance of v6 ("God raised us up... and seated us with him") in the light of 1:19-20?
6. We may talk lots about "God's grace" but how does this passage help us understand this specifically in relation to:
 - a. God's purpose in the new creation? (v7)
 - b. The place of human boasting? (v9)
 - c. The role of good works? (v10)
7. Looking again at v8-10, in what practical directions does this passage encourage or challenge you? E.g. Where might be tempted to boast? How might we misunderstand God's grace in relation to our good works?
8. How might this passage convince us further of God's "incomparably great power for us who believe" (1:19)? How should we pray in the light of this?

NOTES

Ephesians 2:1-10 You were dead in sin but God made us alive with Christ – all by grace!

- YOU WERE dead in sin, disobedient, deserving of wrath (1-3)
- BUT GOD made us alive with Christ (4-7)
- BY GRACE you have been saved ... to do good works (8-10)

After illustrating God's incomparably great power seen in raising & exalting Christ, Paul shows that same power has been at work raising and exalting Christians spiritually, together with Christ. The structure of 'you were' ... 'but now' hits us with the dramatic and fundamentally gracious nature of God's intervention [NB 2:11-22 has a similar shape/structure but highlighting not just individual regeneration but also communal reconciliation between Jew/Gentile]

The dark web of sin and dysfunction mapped in 1-3 is terrifying: Dead in sin, walking in the ways of the world, disobedient under the power of the devil ("the ruler of the kingdom of the air"), going along with the crowd, gratifying the flesh (both in desires & thoughts). It's a comprehensive and nightmarish picture of sin and spiritual deadness across multiple dimensions. The fair and inevitable result? Deserving of wrath (=just anger; God's overwhelming declaration of the truth).

"But ... God." (4) foregrounding God's great love and characteristically rich mercy– God has intervened decisively. Surely no other way possible for the dead, disobedient, enslaved, wrath-deserving creature to obtain a happy outcome, except for the gracious regenerating activity of the gospel's God. Even when we were dead in transgressions (5) – Paul interrupts himself to insist we don't miss: 'it is by grace you have been saved (before repeating that phrase in v8). Amazingly spiritually God has done for the Christian what he has done for Christ – raising us spiritually and even seating us with Christ in the heavenly realm! (6) Why? To demonstrate in the future new creation how amazingly kind and gracious he has been (7). Because no one can miss the thoroughly gracious (undeserving) nature of this salvation - through faith, which is itself a gift, NOT by works, so that no-one can boast (8-10). No, rather the focus is on God, whose handiwork and new creation we are. NB the 'good works' of the Christian life are the result and not the cause of God's (gracious) salvation. Indeed, this is what he prepared in advance.

FOR US: The dark backdrop (>self-awareness). Do we realise just how bleak, hopeless and dead we were outside of Christ? If we fail to grasp this, we'll fail to appreciate the miracle of regeneration. **The deep mercy (>humble awe):** do we see how many ways this passage highlights the loving, merciful, undeserved activity of God towards elect sinners in Christ. You can see why there's no place for boasting! **The high calling (> for good works)** Grace doesn't lead to presumptuousness, laziness or license for sin. Quite the opposite: it is the fuel, motivation and pathway for a life of good works.

TEACHING TIPS:

- (1) **Fight to get past familiarity!** The danger for many of us is that we're aware of concepts of sin/death/grace/new life but the drama and shock of these verses has been dulled by over-familiarity. You may need to probe or give space for the weight and reality of this picture to land. E.g. feel free to ask follow up questions such as "what does that really mean?" "how would you put that in everyday language" "how might you describe that to an unbelieving friend?" Pray beforehand for soft hearts!
- (2) **Look for the shocks/surprises.** Although lots may be familiar, there's details in Ephesians that will likely stretch or challenge us (e.g. talk of 'in the heavenly realms', or 'in the coming ages') – Paul paints on an eternal and cosmic canvas. It's ok for our minds to be stretched and hearts moved to wonder even if we can't precisely pin down all the details in our understandings. What exactly does it mean to be 'seated with Christ in the heavenly realms'? I'm not sure – but wow is it incredible, inspiring and better than I deserve!
- (3) **Let the structure of the passage guide you.** Even if we can't dwell on all the details, the clear section breaks and progression of 1-3, 4-7 and 8-10 give us an overarching flow for the passage. (1) What we were (2) What God did (3) Why and what for? All demonstrating God's incomparably great power (1;19-20)

HINTS FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. It's easy to think people are 'basically good' or 'decent' or 'a bit lost' or 'troubled' but without the profound and stark picture this passage paints of life outside Christ. If there is a disconnect between how we think and how Scripture speaks, this is a good opportunity to listen and learn from God. As always, the aim here is to encourage honesty not 'the right answer'.
2. Some may be familiar, but it's shocking and absolute. No grey area, no wiggle room, no room for any flattery (or hope without some external miraculous intervention). This is not a pleasant or nice way to think of ourselves or anyone else. (And, of course, it isn't an excuse for malice or looking down on anyway – quite the opposite – it's a humbling mirror of what we were. No room for boasting or harshness!)
3. We notice what is sometimes called the world (cultures/systems/ways of thought), the Devil (spiritual personal force of evil) and the flesh (our fallen instincts and desires which take us away from God in thought & deed). It's all-encompassing. No excuse. No way out. Totally bleak. This is not how we usually think. It's certainly not comfortable. But only this honest picture of humanity prepares the way for what follows.
4. What a transformation! From death to life. From no hope except wrath to a gracious inheritance and an eternal future showcasing God's kindness to us. We see that God's activity (what? making us alive) is grounded in God's character (why? love and mercy), not in our merit (while we were still dead ...). Where? Spiritually speaking, in the heavenly realms (where Christ is) though effects will also be seen on earth (in the power of the Spirit who is the down-payment, cf. 1:13-14). Wow.
5. This description of what has happened to the Christian mirrors the what happened to Jesus (1:19-20). Isn't it amazing to see that our union with Christ means that what's true of him can be true of us (even in spite of our past)? Crucially, this is another demonstration and proof of God's incomparably great power. Not only has he raised and seated *Christ* in heaven, he's raised and seated *Christians* spiritually.
6. Instead of talk of God's grace becoming a light or empty cliché,
 - (a) In order to demonstrate his incomparable riches and kindness to us in the new creation (remember: to the praise of his glorious grace (1:6)). This will be our great song for eternity – how kind he has been!
 - (b) How absurd is all human or religious boasting before God. Grace destroys all roots for pride. Not by works. Only by faith, which itself is a gift. (So even when holding out the hard truths of 1-3, we do so with the utmost humility and wonder at God's undeserved kindness). Yet how easy it is to feel smug or superior, especially if we feel we've got our life 'together' more than someone else...
 - (c) This is a crucial principle for a healthy spiritual life. We are not saved BY our good works (no, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone). But we are saved FOR good works (cf. to be holy and blameless in 1:4). What an adventure! God's people are a new creation, created to do good (following the Lord who is good and is goodness itself). What nonsense that predestination or free grace makes people think sin is trivial or obedience is un-necessary...
7. This is a good moment to encourage people to pause and reflect personally. Always a precious moment to hear and share how God's word has spoken to us and it would be a great shame if the 'rush' and 'busyness' of a study denied us the time and space for honest engagement with the Lord. The issues of boasting and good works are raised by the passage itself – but will have countless practical implications or challenges in our lives. Can we get specific? Where exactly are we tempted to boast? Compared to whom? Where in our lives is the call to good works a particular opportunity or struggle now? How does God's word inspire us that this incredible story of sheer grace is to create a new people specifically to do good works? How exactly can our lives commend our Lord and his grace to us?
8. The depth of deadness in 1-3 and the miracle of new life and purpose 4-10 leave us in no doubt: only God could have done it. Only incomparably great power can bring the spiritually dead to life, overturn wrath and disobedience to create people who are eager to do good works. The greatness of power is seen by the greatness of obstacles that power has successfully overcome. This passage is truly epic (and 2:11-22 shows even more obstacles overcome!).