

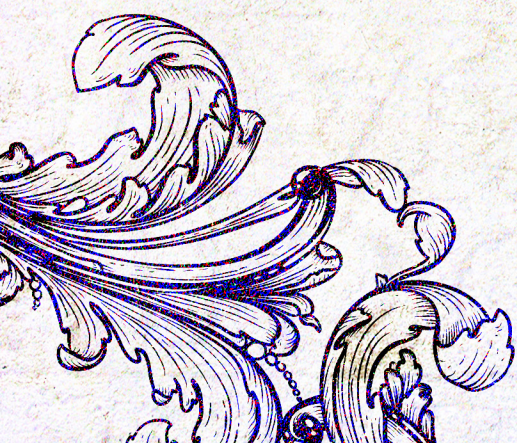


A COLORFUL MYSTERY

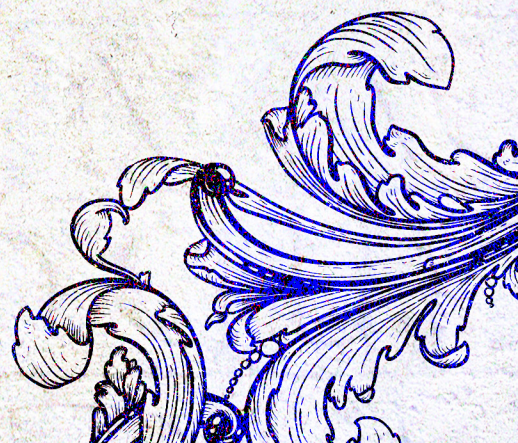
# CHURCH

A STUDY IN EPHESIANS

*a field guide*



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# BUT GOD

DRAWING  
NEAR

In January 2017, during his final news conference, President Barack Obama once emphatically proclaimed,

***"I BELIEVE THERE ARE MORE GOOD PEOPLE THAN BAD."***<sup>1</sup>

The context of his statement was that despite how things may look, America was going to be okay, if we continue to fight for it and not take it for granted. Based on your observations, think about the following questions:

**1] Are humans generally good or bad? What makes someone good? Bad? Explain.**

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**2] Are you a generally good person or nah?**

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<sup>1</sup> Obama, B. (2017). Obama's last transcript. New York Times.

## Q THE CONTEXT

There are many different viewpoints on the question of eternal salvation. One common view says that we are individually responsible for our own destinies and how well we live determines where we will spend eternity. In other words, salvation is largely, if not entirely dependent upon human effort. This view is popular because it appeals to human pride.

It makes us feel in control. It gives us the sense that we can earn our own way. Besides, the notion of having to ask for help is galling to successful, independent people who see themselves as basically decent folks.

Another position says that salvation is a no-strings attached gift from God. We cannot possibly earn it, because we are sinful to the core. To paraphrase the words of C.S. Lewis, we are not basically nice people who need only to clean up our act a bit; rather, we are rebels who need to lay down our arms. Because of this, we are spiritually dead. It's only when we respond to God's gracious overtures, admit our sinfulness and helplessness, and humbly receive Christ's offer of forgiveness and eternal life that we find life.

Obviously, this latter view is unpopular. It is an affront to self-made men and women who want to live without acknowledging or relying upon the Creator. Yet, as we will see in this lesson, this view is taught in Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

## Grace

[ 'grās ] - noun

def: the act of freely providing  
spiritual blessings to sinners  
who do not deserve them



## KEYS TO THE TEXT

**GRACE:** The only gospel of God is the gospel of grace, which is the gospel of divine redemption totally apart from any work or merit of man. We live in grace from the moment of salvation, and if grace ever stopped, we would lose our undeserved salvation and perish in sin. The grace of Christ is God's free and sovereign act of love and mercy in granting

salvation though the death and resurrection of Jesus, apart from anything men are or can do. Not only does He freely give us this salvation, but He sustains it to glorification. It is absurd to accept a gracious salvation and then endeavor to maintain righteous through human efforts, ceremonies, and ritual.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

# UNLEASHING THE TEXT

## Key Terms

Read 2:1-10, noting the key words and definitions next to the passage.

## Ephesians 2:1-10<sup>1</sup>

### Made Alive In Christ

**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 body 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.

**The heart of the gospel pumps bright red in the first two words of verse 4. In verses 1-3 we see that mankind was dead, disobedient, demonic, and destined for destruction. We were prodigals, scoundrels, vile, impure, unholy, treacherous, lecherous, self-absorbed, and self-exalting rebels. That's the bad news. And then this good news: "But God!" We were dead, but God made us alive in Christ. We were not struggler's in need of a helping hand or sinking swimmers in need of a raft; we were stone-cold dead--spiritually lifeless, without a spiritual pulse, without any ability to please God. But he loves the loveless, gives life to the lifeless, and is merciful to those deserving no mercy.<sup>2</sup>**

### DEAD IN TRESPASS AND SINS (V.1)

Total depravity and lostness resulting in an utter inability to know or please God

### COURSE OF THIS WORLD (V.2)

A reference to the ungodly world structure, that system of entities and mind-sets that sets itself up against God and His rule.

### CHILDREN OF WRATH (V. 3)

The rebellious unregenerate who stand condemned before God

### RICH IN MERCY (V. 4)

God lavishes compassion and pity on those He loves, despite their abject sinfulness.

### MADE US ALIVE (V. 5)

A reference to the supernatural act of regeneration, but also with the added nuance of sustaining and persevering life.

### WORKMANSHIP (v.10)

A work of art, a masterpiece. We get our English word "poem" from the Greek word used here.

<sup>1</sup>ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

**3] How does Paul graphically describe those who are dead in sin? How does this compare to your experience before you became a Christian?**

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**4] Highlight or underline the word grace used in this short passage. What other words does Paul use in the passage to describe God's actions toward the lost? <sup>1</sup>**

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**5] How are grace and faith related in our salvation?**

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***Paul talks more about what God has done for us in Romans 5:6-11***

### **Romans 5:6-11<sup>2</sup>**

**6** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

<sup>2</sup>ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

## EXPLORING THE MEANING

6] What themes in this passage from Romans echo the message of 2:1-10?

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## REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

7] How much do evil spiritual forces impact our reality today? How do we combat it?

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## TRUTH FOR TODAY

When we accept the finished work of Christ on our behalf, we act by the faith supplied by God's grace. When a person chokes or drowns and stops breathing, there is nothing he can do. If he ever breathes again, it will be because someone else starts him breathing. A person who is spiritual dead cannot even make a decision of faith unless God first breathes into him the breath of spiritual life. Faith is simply breathing the breath that God's grace supplies. Yet, the paradox is that we must exercise it and bear the responsibility if we do not.<sup>1</sup>

**FAITH ALONE** JUSTIFIES,  
BUT FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES  
IS **NEVER ALONE!**

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. Ephesians: Our Immeasurable Blessings in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.