

Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction

What are the three basic ingredients in a sentence? Subject (I), main verb (hit), and usually an object (the ball). In Ephesians 2:1-7 we have a sentence of 124 words – so where do we find these three main ingredients (subject, verb, and object)?

Paul starts off with the words, “And **YOU...**” That will be the “object” in the sentence. But then he breaks off without giving us any subject or main verb. So what is it that has *happened* to the Ephesians (where’s the verb)? And who has done it (where’s the subject)? While we wait for the answers to these questions, Paul spends a great deal of time on the object – “And **you.**” The “you” is the Ephesians, but it’s also all of us. We are, all of us, the object of this sentence.

And **YOU**—

being dead in **your** trespasses and sins
in which **you** once walked,
according to the age of this world,
according to the ruler of the authority of the air,
of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,
among whom **we all** also once lived in the passions of **our** flesh,
carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind,
and were by nature children of wrath
even as the rest;

Paul could not have painted a more hopeless or a more impossible picture. We were spiritually **dead**. Because of our sin, we were cut off from God – who is the source of true life. But being cut off from God, it was **impossible** for us to walk in anything other than our trespasses and sins. We were walking according to the age of this world. Instead of being concerned with eternal values or with the judgment to come, we went along with what was fashionable and acceptable and were concerned only with the activities and values of this present age. We were slaves to the power and influence of the age of this world, and so it was **impossible** for us to set our minds on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-4). If the world was the ocean, then we were fish swimming in the ocean. We had no thoughts for any life above the surface of the water. We were immersed in the world and carried along by its currents. We could not escape because like fish in the sea, we didn’t want to escape. We were walking according to the ruler of the authority of the air. We were entirely subject to Satan’s will, though our minds were blinded so that we couldn’t see it. We were deceived by his lies (who is the father of lies; John 8:44), and yet we **could not** be undeceived because we had no will to believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:9-12). We all once lived among the sons of disobedience. All of our disobedience flowed from our ultimate disobedience of refusing to believe and trust in God’s free provision of salvation and the forgiveness of sins (2 Thess. 2:10-11).

➤ John 6:28-29 — Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

All works that don't flow from this belief in God's infinite provision of salvation *can only be* works of disobedience. And so *all* that we did was disobedience. Our entire life was characterized by disobedience. Even our "good deeds" were just the evidence of our refusal to believe and love the truth about God's gracious provision of salvation. And so there could be absolutely **no hope** that we would ever change. We lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We **wanted** to pursue our own pleasure and happiness in this world which lies under the dominion of Satan. We **wanted** to pursue our own pleasure and happiness independently of God. We **wanted** to be our own gods – to set our own standards of "right" and "wrong," to be the center around which all of our thoughts revolved. We walked according to the age of this world, and according to the ruler of the authority of the air not because we were held against our will, but because this was what we **wanted**. We weren't just in slavery to Satan and the world around us, but to the **desires** within our own hearts. It was **impossible** to escape from these desires because they were what we truly **wanted** most of all. We couldn't escape from ourselves. We were by nature children of wrath even as the rest. "God does not condemn the innocent" (Calvin). But if *we* were *all* children of wrath, what must this say about our sin and our guilt? "By nature" means "by birth." There was **never** any possibility or hope that we would choose any other way.

- Romans 5:12 — Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to *all men*, because *all sinned*.

"Our condition, therefore... may well excite our horror" (Calvin). Paul could not have painted a more hopeless or a more impossible picture. But that was us. That was every single one of us. And so now Paul is ready for the subject of his sentence.

I. "but God"

Here is the whole Gospel in two words. Into this hopeless, impossible equation comes the God for whom **nothing** can be impossible. Into this hopeless, impossible equation comes the God who can accomplish all things.

If there was no "but," we'd **naturally** assume that Paul was introducing God as the one bringing the wrath and judgment and destruction that we all deserve. "**BUT... God**" Those *two* words are the sweetest music that our souls could ever want to hear. Here is the beginning, middle, and end of the Gospel in two beautiful, powerful words.

II. "but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us"

So we have the object of the sentence (that's us) and now the subject of the sentence (that's God), but we still don't have any main verb. We still don't know *exactly what it is* that God has done to us, or with us, or for us. First, Paul has something he wants to say about God Himself.

Whatever it is that God has done, it's because He is so *rich in mercy* – because of His *great love with which He loved us*. Paul is not content to say that God is merciful, *or* that He is loving. He is merciful *and* loving. But that's still not enough: He is *rich* in mercy and His love is *great* – that love *with which He loved us*. "Mercy" and "love" are synonyms here – they aren't meant to

be given separate definitions. The point is that when it comes to the great theme of our salvation, Paul's goal is never to use one word where two will do – or even two or three words where five or six will do.

So often we can think of mercy purely in its modern legal sense of *not* giving us what we *do* deserve. From the context here in Ephesians, it's obviously true that God's mercy is undeserved. But Paul's point, here, is not just the punishment He doesn't give us, but also, and especially, all of His tender compassions towards us. This explains how Paul can say that God is **rich** in mercy. Or we could think of God's **many** mercies to us. The people who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek used this same Greek word for mercy to translate a Hebrew word that means "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love."

- Isaiah 63:7 — I will recount the *steadfast love* of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the *great goodness* to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his *compassion*, according to the abundance of his *steadfast love*.
- Ruth 1:8 — Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal *kindly* with you."

These Greek translators also used this same word for "mercy" to translate other Hebrew words that mean compassion and favor.

- Isaiah 54:7 — For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great *compassion* I will gather you.
- Isaiah 60:10 — In my wrath I struck you, but in my *favor* I have had [*compassion*] on you.
- Isaiah 63:15 — Where are your zeal and your might? *The stirring of your inner parts* and your compassion...
- Cf. Psalm 90:14; 106:7; 141:5; Psalm 109:16; Psalm 63:3

God's mercy is His wonderful kindness, and tenderness, and compassion, and love. We can even be so bold as to say that God's mercy is the stirring of His inner parts toward us.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..." Now are we ready for the main verb? Not yet.

III. "even when we were dead in our trespasses"

You see, *this... this* is what astonishes Paul. Just in case we've forgotten all that he just said in verses 1-3 about how utterly **hopeless** was our condition, Paul picks up the phrase from verse 1 and repeats it here in verse 5. "And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins (etc., etc., etc.)... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses..." (cf. Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). It is understanding the object ("And you"), that makes us fully able to glory in the subject (But God...), and be ready, now, for the main verb. Are *we* ready, now, to hear exactly what it is that God has done to us, or with us, or for us?

IV. “But God... made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved!), and raised us up together with Him, and seated us together with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”

It’s not one main verb, but three! But look! After the first main verb, Paul interrupts himself *again* (for the third time). He just breaks out with a pure exclamation of praise and amazement: “**by grace you are saved!** And the point, here, is obviously “by grace **ALONE**”! — Grace as a **free, unmerited, wholly undeserved, sovereign, gift**. If we who were dead in trespasses and sins have been made alive because of God’s rich mercy and great love, then it’s **by grace alone** not just that we *were* saved but that we **are saved even now**. Paul is not marveling at this grace in the past tense. He’s marveling at this grace in the perfect tense. It’s a grace that we have received, and are receiving, and will go on receiving for time without end. This grace comes to us without ever ceasing, and so it comes to us without ever ceasing for one moment to be wholly **undeserved**. By grace you **are** saved! Grace is all. Grace alone.

And now what about those main verbs? What about what God has done? In English, we translate these verses with 31 words, but the Greek has only 16 words. Let me show you why.

But God...	//	made us alive together with	//	Christ
	//	synezoopoiesen	//	
and	//	raised us up together with	//	[Him]
	//	synegeiren	//	
and	//	seated us together with	//	[Him]
	//	synekathisen	//	

It takes us fourteen words just to translate Paul’s three main verbs. These are what we call compound verbs because they’re all made up of a verb (God made us alive, raised us up, and seated us) *plus* a preposition. You can see it there in the bolded letters. See how the same preposition is added to all three verbs: “Syn... syn... syn... together with... together with... together with...” In fact, Paul is apparently the one who invented the first word just for this occasion, adding “syn” to “zoopoieo” to create his own word meaning “make us alive **together with**.” And so if we were reading the Greek, almost before we noticed the main verbs we’d notice the repeated preposition, “syn.” “God made us alive **together with Christ** and raised us up **together with Him** and seated us **together with Him**.” And so as we meditate on these words, all we can think is that He is, and must be, our “**everything**.” Christ **ALONE** is our everything. He is our all. He is our salvation from start to finish and everything in the middle – from beginning to end and everything in between. All that we are now and all that we can ever hope to be is all because of Him – and not just because of what He has done, but because we have been **joined together with Him**. You could almost say that the preposition *is* the main verb.

What has God done? He has **joined us together with** Christ. And He has done this so thoroughly, and so perfectly, and so completely that Paul can even say this: God has **made us alive** together with Christ and **raised us up** together with Him and **seated us** together with Him in the heavenly places. We’re already sharing in Christ’s resurrection life even before the resurrection of our bodies (cf. John 5:24). It *has* to be this way, because we’ve already been so effectively **joined together with Him**. That’s why Paul can even say that we’ve already been resurrected from the

dead. God made us alive together with Christ *and raised us up together with Him*. This spiritual resurrection that we've already experienced is the guarantee that one day our bodies will also follow in the pattern of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:11). It *has* to be this way, because we've already been so powerfully *joined together with Him*. **We were dead** in our trespasses and sins, Paul says, but it was **when** we were dead in our trespasses that **God made us alive** together with Christ and raised us up together with Him.

I think of the song that we sing: "I was blinded by my sin, had no ears to hear Your voice, did not know Your love within, had no taste for heaven's joys. Then Your Spirit gave me life, opened up Your Word to me, through the gospel of Your Son gave me endless hope and peace." (Bob Kauflin) And so we walk now, as Paul says, in **newness** of life – in the newness of Christ's own resurrection life (cf. Rom. 6:4) – no longer according to the age of this world, no longer as sons of disobedience, no longer as children of wrath. And so Paul would say to us:

- Colossians 3:1–2 — If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Paul has just spoken in Ephesians chapter one of the "powerful working of the strength of [God's] might that He powerfully worked in Christ **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named... and He put all things under His feet." (Eph. 1:19-22). Now Paul says that God has raised us up together with Christ and seated us together with Him in the heavenly places. So what does that mean? It means that we share not only in His resurrection life, but in His power and authority over sin and death, and over Satan with all his forces of evil. We were walking according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, but then, in the very midst of our slavery and rebellion, God raised us up together with Christ and seated us together with Him in the heavenly places. We now share in Christ's royal authority over the very one to whom we were once hopelessly enslaved.

What a transformation! What a miracle of saving grace! We no longer have to succumb to the evil one's designs (O'Brien). Now we can do battle with the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places having put on the whole armor of God, and we can know that we will withstand in the evil day, and having done all, we will stand and have the victory, and Satan himself will be crushed under our feet (cf. Eph. 6:12-13; Rom. 16:20). So complete has been the victory of Christ in which we now share that even our martyrdom at the cruel hands of Satan is just the path to our final triumph.

- Revelation 12:11 — And they have **conquered** [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, **for they loved not their lives even unto death**.

We have been *so* totally, and completely, and even radically transformed! While there *is* a gradual process in the Christian life, the change from death to life was an instantaneous, miraculous conversion and **transformation** by God's powerful saving grace. We are God's **new creation** "in Christ Jesus" (cf. Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). And Paul's point, here, is certainly, Christ **alone**. What could ever possibly be added to the merits of Christ and to the triumph that He has

won? Nothing! Our salvation is all, from beginning to end, Christ **ALONE**! And dare we ask *why* God has done all of this for us? Paul answers:

V. so that He might show in the coming ages the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

“so that He might show in the coming ages the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Let me just briefly ask: “What does Paul mean by ‘the coming ages?’” And I’ll answer with the words of F. F. Bruce:

“‘the ages to come’... implies one age supervening on another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach. Throughout time and eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness” – “so that He might show in the coming ages the exceeding riches of *His grace* in kindness *toward us* in Christ Jesus.”

Conclusion

Truly, all of our salvation is **to the glory of God ALONE**. Everything started with those two words, “*but God.*” “But God” is the whole Gospel in two words precisely because there’s no mention of **me**, or of anything **I** have done. I already know what it’s necessary for me to know about me from the first three verses. I was dead in sin, a willing slave to the world and to Satan, a son of disobedience, a slave of my own passions and desires, and by nature a child of God’s wrath. And it was **precisely when**—“**even when**”—all of these things were still completely and fully true of each one of us that *God* saved us — by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. And upon what authority do we learn and know all of these saving truths? Upon **Scripture ALONE** as the very word of God to us.

Is the Holy Spirit opening your eyes to see just how rich in mercy God is, and how great is His love with which He has loved us, and how lavish are the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus?

“But GOD... even when.”

How will we live our lives today, tomorrow, and the next day in the light of *this* Gospel? Will we first of all rest fully in the peace of knowing that not only is it impossible for us to merit even the tiniest part of our salvation, but we don’t half to. Will we consciously and actively trust and rely fully on what God has done in joining us together with Christ by grace alone? And will we, then, live all parts of our lives truly to the glory of God – **ALONE**.

- **Ephesians 2:8–10** — 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, **that we should walk in them.**

And **YOU**—

being dead in your trespasses and sins
in which you once walked, according to the age of this world,
according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now at work in the sons
of disobedience, among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh,
carrying out 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 trespasses,

—**MADE** us **ALIVE** *together with Christ*

(by grace you are saved)

and **RAISED** us **UP** *together with Him*

and **SEATED** us *together with him*

in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

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