

Ephesians 2:8-10¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

2. The new position: alive in God ([2:4-10](#))

⁴But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Notes**[2:4](#)**

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much.—The conjunction “but” denotes a strong contrast to what was said before. The contrast is between mankind's sinfulness and God's gracious acts of love. Paul includes so many qualifiers that it makes it difficult to see the main assertions in the English text. God is the subject ([2:4](#)) and the main verbs are in the next two verses ([2:5-6](#)). Leaving out the qualifying clauses, it would read, “But God made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” This verse deals with the subject and two qualifiers—namely, that God is rich in mercy, which is further qualified by “he loved us so much.” The expression “and he loved us so much” is not a secondary concept to “rich in mercy” but, rather, is the cause or motive of God's mercy. It could be rendered, “God is so rich in mercy because he loved us so very much.”

[2:5](#)

he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.—These 11 English words are expressed by three words in the Greek text, literally translated “enlivened with Christ.” The verb is a compound verb, which denotes that God made us alive together with Christ. Thus, when Christ was made alive physically, we were made alive spiritually.

(It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)—This parenthetical clause has only three words in Greek. It is a perfect periphrastic construction focusing on the present results of salvation. Although it is translated “you have been saved” (as in ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NRSV), it is better to render it “you are saved” (as KJV, NEB) in order to convey the idea of the continuing results of salvation.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 49-52.

2:6

because we are united with Christ Jesus.—In place of “because we are united with Christ Jesus” the Greek text has only “in Christ Jesus.” The prepositional phrase “in Christ Jesus” is rather difficult to understand, but the NLT rendering clarifies it well.

2:7

God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us.—The Greek text makes it clear that this verse expresses a purpose that will be accomplished in the future—most likely after Christ’s return when believers will be physically resurrected.

2:8

God saved you by his grace when you believed.—The better-known rendering of this part of the verse is “for by grace are you saved through faith.” The word “believed” is the cognate verb of the noun “faith.” Essentially this clause states that the basis of our salvation is God’s grace or favor and the means is faith.

it is a gift from God.—Much debate revolves around the word “it” here. To what does “it” refer? Some think it refers back to either “favor” or “faith” (Westcott 1906:32), but neither of these suggestions are acceptable because in Greek both of these nouns are feminine, whereas the demonstrative pronoun *touto* [^{TG}<G3778>, ^{ZG}4047] (this) is neuter. It is better to view the neuter as collective, in which case “it” would refer to the concept of salvation (2:4-8a), which includes grace and faith (Lincoln 1990:112; Best 1998:226; O’Brien 1999:175).

2:9

Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done.—Not only is salvation not a “reward for the good things we have done,” it also is not a payment or wage that has been earned “for the good things we have done.” In other words, we cannot earn salvation. Since salvation is not obtained by our efforts, we cannot boast.

2:10

He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.—The NLT makes it clear that “the good things” are what God has planned for us. The Greek is literally translated, “for good works which he prepared beforehand in order that we might walk in them.” The relative pronoun “which” (*hois* [^{TG}<G3739>, ^{ZG}4005]) presents a problem. Some view it as a dative of destination and render it “to which God prepared us beforehand” (Luther, cited by Eadie 1883:158-159). However, the absence of the personal pronoun *hēmas* [^{TG}<G1473>, ^{ZG}1609] (us) is fatal to this view. Others suggest that *hois* is masculine and translate it, “for whom God prepared us beforehand” (Eadie 1883:158-159; Abbott 1897:54-55). But in this case, who is the antecedent? The antecedent “we” (*hēmeis* [^{TG}<G1473>, ^{ZG}1609]) is too remote (2:3, 7), whereas the nearest antecedent, “good works” (*ergois agathois* [^{TG}<G2041>/<G0018>, ^{ZG}2240/0019]), as well as the following pronoun “them” (*autois* [^{TG}<G846>, ^{ZG}899]) refer to works and not people. Thus, the interpretation that makes the best sense is that the dative plural relative pronoun *hois* has shown up in place of the expected neuter nominative plural “which” (*ha* [^{TG}<G3739>, ^{ZG}4005]) under the influence of the dative plural *ergois agathois*; hence, “which [good works] God prepared beforehand.”

Commentary

With humanity in a desperate condition of sinfulness, the words “But God” may conjure fear in anticipation of his wrath. However, Paul continues by explaining that God is rich in mercy to a humanity in a deplorable situation. To further define “mercy,” Paul continues by stating that God loves humanity so very much. This is a welcome relief. Did he forget their dilemma? Not at all. But before Paul made his main assertions regarding God’s mercy based on love ([2:5b-6](#)), Paul reminded the believers once again of their sinful past condition ([2:5a](#)). This reminder was necessary to establish the need for God’s mercy. We should have died, but Christ died in our stead in order that we can have forgiveness and acceptance before God. This is mercy based on love.

Although the subject (“God”) and its qualifiers are in [2:4-5a](#), the main assertions are made in [2:5b-6](#) with three clauses, each introduced by a verb: “gave us life [with Christ],” “raised us from the dead along with Christ,” and “seated us with him in the heavenly realms.” These three verbs are compound verbs prefixed with the preposition “with.” First, unbelievers are given life by God in association with Christ ([2:5b](#)). This refers to spiritual life and not the physical resurrection of believers. Christ died physically; we were dead spiritually. Christ was raised physically ([1:20](#)); we were raised together with Christ spiritually. We were dead spiritually, and now he has made us alive spiritually. This new life occurred at the time of our conversion.

Before proceeding to the second verb, Paul parenthetically exclaims, “by grace you are saved,” or as the NLT renders it, “it is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!” Grace is God’s unmerited or undeserved favor toward sinners that provides salvation to them through the sacrificial death of Christ. The word “saved” indicates deliverance. This context states that we were dead in our sins and under God’s wrath; the rescue or deliverance from that wrath could not be obtained outside of God’s grace. “Saved” is a perfect passive participle, which further amplifies grace. It is often called a divine passive, where God clearly is the subject who saves sinners by his gracious act. The perfect tense expresses a completed action with continuing results. The completed action occurred the moment we were made alive together with Christ at our conversion. In other words, God, by his grace, initially saved us, and by that same grace he keeps us safe or saved from his wrath, as well as from sin’s grip of death from which we were delivered. However, one must not think that the use of the perfect tense in itself indicates a future deliverance. It is the God behind the perfect tense that guarantees the future deliverance.

Second, God raised us up with Christ ([2:6a](#)). This does not refer to future physical resurrection but spiritual resurrection. Our spiritual resurrection corresponds with Christ’s physical resurrection. When Christ was resurrected, all power was given to him ([Matt 28:18](#); [Rom 1:4](#)), and now believers are identified with him. Furthermore, he dwells in us and gives us his enabling power in order that we might live the new, resurrected life.

Third, not only were we made alive with Christ and resurrected with him, but God has seated us with him in the heavenly realms ([2:6b](#)). As God raised and seated Christ in the heavenly realms physically ([1:20](#)), so has God raised and seated us together with Christ in the heavenly realms spiritually. As discussed in [1:3](#), it is from the heavenly realms that believers derive all their spiritual benefits. Seated in the heavenly realms, believers now have a heavenly status with heavenly power to overcome the powers of sin and death. Paul adds “in Christ Jesus,” which is rendered in the NLT as “because we are united with Christ Jesus.” In other words, believers are raised with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms because they are in Christ Jesus. This is evidence of the magnitude of God’s grace.

In [2:6](#), Paul asserts that God has given us life with Christ, raised us from the dead along with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly realms. [Verse 7](#) explains that the purpose of these actions is to demonstrate the incredible wealth of his grace in the coming ages. The text not only speaks of God’s favor but also points out that this favor is kindness directed toward us. The word “kindness” basically

means that which is appropriate or fitting; it refers to God's act of setting us free and seating us with Christ in the heavenly realms. The kindness encompasses the entire work of salvation which is appropriate or fitting to God and was done in connection with or located in Christ Jesus and directed toward us. The mention of the incredible wealth of his favor is reminiscent of [1:7](#) where the same Greek phrase is used in speaking of Christ's redemption as "so rich in kindness and grace." Redemption means to set us free from sin, and this will happen completely "in all future ages." God is going to display us as his trophies of grace—we who once deserved nothing but wrath. Even the angels in heaven will be awestruck at this incredible display of God's favor and kindness because they will realize what it cost him.

This description of undeserved salvation is further expanded in [2:8-10](#). In these verses Paul explains that salvation is totally by grace, apart from any person's involvement. He begins by stating that God saved us by his special favor when we believed in what God did for us in the work of redemption in Christ Jesus. Again, salvation is not credited to us as though we had earned it. This is made very clear by the next sentence: Paul states that we cannot take credit for it, because it was not obtained through our efforts. Rather, salvation is a gift from God. This is grace. In [2:9](#) Paul reinforces this by stating that because we have not earned salvation we cannot boast. It is God's grace, and not human effort, that is the basis of salvation. We receive this gracious gift of salvation through faith, that is, through trusting in the salvation God has offered us.

Furthermore, Paul explains that this great salvation cannot be earned, because the recipients of it are God's masterpiece. The word "masterpiece" refers to the work of a skilled craftsman creating a work of art. In the New Testament, it is used only here and in [Romans 1:20](#). In [Romans 1:20](#), it refers to God's creation (as in [Pss 92:4](#) [91:5, LXX]; [143:5](#) [142:5, LXX]); in Ephesians it is used of God's new creation. The first reference speaks of the physical Creation of God, and the second, the spiritual re-creation of God. Paul makes it clear that he was speaking about spiritual re-creation: "He has created us anew in Christ Jesus." God's purpose for this new creation is to have a vehicle through whom he might work, as he had planned long ago. The literal translation of the Greek text would be, "for we are his masterpiece, having been created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God prepared beforehand in order that we might walk in them." Hence, we were created by Christ Jesus as his masterpiece with the goal of good works. God's workmanship is not achieved by good works, but it results in good works ([Titus 2:14](#); [3:8](#)). But how are these works accomplished? Are they to be done by our efforts? No! What is portrayed here is just the opposite. God has prepared for each of us a path of good works that cannot be accomplished by our efforts but by his effective working in us. Essentially, Paul was telling the Ephesians that God had prepared a path of good works for the believers and that he would perform these works in and through them as they lived by faith. Thus, we do not do a work for God; instead, God performs his work in and through his children (cf. [Phil 2:13](#)). Since these are God's good works, there is no cause for any person to boast.

In conclusion, [2:1-10](#) explains how, though humanity was spiritually dead and deserved only God's anger, God, in his marvelous grace, has provided salvation through faith. Believers are God's masterpiece in whom and through whom he performs his good works that he had already prepared in advance. This section, presenting the essence of the gospel, provides the best summary concerning salvation in all of Paul's writings.

The Complete Biblical Commentary

Ephesians 2:8-10²

2:8. [Verses 8-10](#) remind believers that they need to accept what God has provided them in Christ Jesus. We see an amplification of the statement in [verse 5](#), "by grace ye are saved." In the original language this verse begins with the definite article "the" before "grace" (*tē... chariti*). Also, the verse begins in the Greek with a postpositive "for" (*gar*) which could be translated "because." Grace is the "cause" for the total plan of God. On the one hand, grace is the objective, instrumental cause of salvation. On the other hand, faith is the subjective medium for the process of salvation, so it is a necessary condition. "It is the gift of God" refers to the whole process of salvation, not just to the granting of faith to believe.

2:9. This is probably the reason Paul reminds us in the previous verse that salvation cannot be earned in any way. There is no possibility of self-achieved salvation, and no reason for boasting.

2:10. Even though it is not possible to earn salvation, this verse reminds us that work indeed is involved in the total process, that is, God's work. We are the result of that work. The total passage has come "full circle." [Verse 2](#) reminds us that those in a lost state "walked" (*periepatēsate*) a certain way. The last word in [verse 10](#) in the Greek language is the word "walk" (*peripatēsōmen*) again. Only here the walking as believers is as His "workmanship," as products of what God's grace can do in people. Christians are God's "work of art," His "masterpiece," so they may "walk about" in good works. In fact, believers were "created in Christ Jesus" for that very purpose. Good works do not bring salvation to a person; they are the result of salvation.

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 113-115.