

## [Ephesians 2:1-7](#)

### **But God - Two Words That Change Everything**

***2*** Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ***2*** You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.<sup>[a]</sup> He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ***3*** All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

***4*** But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ***5*** that 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!) ***6*** For 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. ***7*** So 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.

### **Introduction**

But God - two words that change everything. Those two words, but God, are found not only in the text for this message, but other passages in the Bible as well. They're the lynch pin, the hub, the focus, the central theme of the Bible. That God would rescue people like us from the dark domain of sin, and transfer us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14). That's the message of the cross.

"But God" verses have a common thread. First of all, a problem needs to be addressed. Secondly, there's a turning point in that only God, in His grace-driven, mercy-laden sovereignty has the perfect solution to the problem. And last of all, the great outcome is always for His glory and for the good of His people. For example, here's what Scripture says in [Psalm 73:26](#).

*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*  
[Psalms 73:26](#) (ESV)

In the first part of the verse, we see the problem; the physical body fails by sickness, age and death. Then the turning point occurs where God Himself is the perfect solution to the problem. He is the strength and deliverer of the one who trusts Him. The great outcome is that the soul, the inner man, is secure for eternity.

Another one of the "but God" verses in Scripture that you may remember was presented in a sermon recently by Pastor Dan, as he preached on [Genesis 50:20](#), which is considered the flagship verse of the book of Genesis.

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*  
[Gen 50:20](#) (ESV)

Pastor Dan emphasized that in that one verse, God allows us to see that His sovereignty and providence is over all things, including evil. The two words “but God” indicate He made the difference in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and ultimately the entire nation of Israel for His glory and for the good of His people.

So, referencing the text from [Ephesians 2:1-7](#), there are three (3) points in this message that will allow us to see the what, the how and the why of the good news message of the cross found in those two words - but God. They are as follows:

- Our biggest problem apart from Christ - [vs 1-3](#)
- God's perfect solution found only in Christ - [vs 4-6](#)
- The great outcome: our enjoyment of God forever in Christ - [vs 7](#)

## **History**

The apostle Paul, inspired by God, wrote the book of Ephesians to the churches around the city of Ephesus, which would be in present-day Turkey. He wrote this book, while in prison probably in Rome, about A.D. 60. The key truths of the first three chapters of the book include spiritual blessings and unsearchable riches found only in Christ, as well as the fact that sinners are rescued by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The text from [Ephesians 2:1-7](#) is especially rich in these truths, as it displays the gospel that has changed millions of lives who are secure in Christ. These verses, in particular, would be excellent for sharing with others as a witness to God's saving grace and mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, if there were a "top ten" list of greatest Bible passages, this one would be on my list. Let's take a look at this beautiful Scripture, which right off the bat shows us we have a big problem apart from Christ.

### **1. Our Biggest Problem Apart From Christ**

[Ephesians 2:1-3](#) states three (3) key truths about our biggest problem apart from Christ. These verses indicate respectively that we were: 1) dead in trespasses and sins, 2) followers of Satan and 3) children of wrath. Please note the use of the words "were", "once walked", and "once lived". Paul was definitely using past tense language to indicate that as believer in Christ, this was who we once were apart from Christ. Paul even included himself to make no mistake that he, too, had been dead in sin, a follower of Satan and a child of wrath. Let's take a look at these in more depth.

**a. Dead in sins ([vs 1](#))** - As descendants of Adam, all of us are born spiritually dead. Dead in our sins and apart from Christ. Dead people cannot revive themselves on their own; there is no hope for life. Even more sobering is the truth that there's a separation from God due to sin, resulting in spiritual darkness, a hardness of heart and an alienation from God. Here's what [Ephesians 4:18](#) says about that.

*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

[Eph 4:18](#) (ESV) Being dead in sin is definitely bad news, but there's more.

**b. Followers of Satan (vs 2)** - Apart from Christ, a person is following "the prince of the power of the air", which is considered to be Satan. In [Ephesians 2:2-3](#), it states that followers of Satan are "sons of disobedience", living out the passions of the flesh and carrying out the desires of the mind. Furthermore, the apostle John describes this as a love for the world and not a love for the Father in [1 John 2:16](#).

*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

[1 John 2:16](#) (ESV) The news is getting worse isn't it? But there's still more.

**c. Children of wrath (vs 3)** - Just as we are all born spiritually dead, we are all born children of wrath. It's our nature, just like the rest of mankind. A biblical definition for the word "wrath" is God's righteous anger and judgment. Pastor Ryan preached on the topic of anger recently. He indicated that God's anger is always right and brings good into bad situations, even if the best thing is judgment. Therefore, a child of wrath is someone who deserves God's anger and judgment. How about this verse from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.

*Behold the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. [Jer 30:23](#) (ESV)*

Apart from Christ, the picture is not pretty of our biggest problem as described in [Ephesians 2:1-3](#). In fact, John Piper, pastor, author and founder of Desiring God ministry, says this in his sermon titled "But God": "Imagine yourself in any crisis in the world—captive to a gunman in a French court, streaking to earth in a crashing jet, frozen ten hours in a bank of snow, hovering on the brink with a Jarvik-7—whatever crisis you could imagine yourself in, I tell you on the authority of God's Word your condition right now in this room and at this moment is more critical and more urgent and more threatening without a Savior than anything you can imagine." So who can rescue a person from this problem? God has the perfect solution found only in Christ.

## **2. God's Perfect Solution Found Only in Christ**

Why would the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all life, the God who is present everywhere, the God who knows everything, the God who is all-powerful, provide the solution to our biggest problem? Take a look at [Ephesians 2:4-6](#). The powerful and life-changing message of the cross is here. The very essence of all of the stories in the Bible is here. The best news a person could ever read or hear are wrapped up in these very words of God. Unfathomable, incomprehensible, amazing and astonishing words they are, and they're all true. And the news gets even better; it's meant for you and me. Why should that make a difference for us? Let's dig a little deeper into the truth of God's perfect solution to our biggest problem is only found in Christ.

**a. Made Us Alive Together With Christ** - Think about it. Because God is rich in mercy and has a great love for us, He changed everything about us. Our lives were changed forever when He made us alive together with Christ. We became united with Christ; we were credited with the completeness and perfection of Christ; we were clothed with the righteousness of Christ. This

means everything changed because of who God is for us. We were once dead in our sins, but God made us alive together with Christ. We were once followers of Satan, but God made us followers of Christ. We were once children of wrath, but God made us children of His very own.

And not only did he do all of that; He did it while we were still dead in our trespasses, as [verse 5](#) in the text so plainly states. In other words, God in Christ rescued us from His wrath, saved us from ourselves and made us a child of His very own while we were still sinners. Here's what Scripture says about that in [Romans 5:8](#).

*...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*  
[Romans 5:8](#) (ESV)

What this means is that we didn't have to get our act together before God would love us. We didn't have to be good enough to find favor with God. We didn't have to do something to win His approval. The Lord Jesus already did all of those things for us when He died on the cross and rose from the grave. Jesus took the punishment of God's wrath so that sinners can have freedom from sin and peace with God. Do you recall the message on Maundy Thursday about Jesus and Barabbas - the great exchange? Guilty people, like Barabbas and you and me, were set free and the innocent man, Jesus, was condemned. Then on Resurrection Sunday, we heard that by the power of God, Jesus was resurrected from the dead, as the validation of His dying for sin, as well as the validation of all God's promises finding their "yes" in Christ. That's the good news message of the cross.

What grace, mercy and love is shown by God in the message of the cross! Grace is about that which we didn't deserve, but received anyway. Mercy is about that which we deserved, but didn't receive because of grace. To say that God has treated us better than we deserve is an understatement of cosmic proportions when we realize the perfect sacrifice of Jesus rescues people from sin, death and hell. Saved by grace indeed! All of this is held fast on the foundation of God's rich mercy and great love for us. But God didn't stop there. There's more!

### **b. Raised Us Up With Him and Seated Us With Him in Christ**

Not only did God make us alive together with Christ, but He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When I picture this in my mind, I see a child being raised up in their father's arms and seated alongside of him in a special place that only a son or a daughter is privileged to be. In fact, in the case of verse 6, only the son or daughter of the King, Abba Father, Daddy, would be privileged to sit with Him in the highest place. The child was chosen, not out of their own merit, but due to the King's rich mercy and great love.

In Scripture, we see this in the story of King David and Mephibosheth, the grandson of David's enemy, King Saul ([2 Samuel 9](#)). In the Near East culture, the reigning king had every right to kill all of those related to his enemies. Mephibosheth deserved death. Yet King David in his mercy and grace received him into the family as a son, to sit at the king's table always. Once an enemy, now a son seated with the king at his table. That's a picture of the grace, mercy and love that's found only in Christ, the King of kings. We are to see ourselves as Mephibosheth. Once an enemy of God, but now a son or a daughter seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Thank you Jesus! But wait; there's still more good news!

### **3. Our Enjoyment of God Forever in Christ**

At the beginning of [Ephesians 2:7](#), there are two little words, "so that", which are like a huge electronic billboard that notifies us in brilliant letters - "Here's why God has lavished upon us the abundance of His grace and mercy. Here's why God made us alive together with Christ, even though we were dead in our sins. Here's why He saved us from being a follower of the devil to a follower of Christ. Here's why He sealed us with His promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our salvation in Christ." God in Christ did all of that so we could enjoy Him forever.

In fact, the truth of the matter is that our enjoyment of God is for right now and in the coming ages. How long is an age? It is eternal. That's a long time! [Psalm 90:2](#) says that "from everlasting to everlasting you are God". So, we're to understand that God changed everything for us, so that we could enjoy Him for all eternity. And not only that, but note the fact that this grace He has freely given us is immeasurable. The only way I can describe the word immeasurable would be to think of an ocean without a shore or a river that has no beginning and no end. His grace is without limits. It has no end. And this indescribable, unfathomable grace is given in God's kindness toward us in Christ Jesus forever. That's the good news message of the cross.

In a culture that grows increasingly hostile to the message of the cross, we need to be strengthened with the Word of God through the Holy Spirit's guidance that God indeed is to be enjoyed today, tomorrow and forever. The fact that the dimensions of His grace, mercy and love for us are limitless, even while we were still sinners, should cause us to be in awe and astonishment of who God is. Why is that important to you and me? Here's what Scripture says about that in [Ephesians 3:17-19](#).

*<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

[Eph 3:17-19](#) (ESV)

#### **Something to Think About**

So what difference does this unfathomable, incomprehensible, good news message of the cross, the gospel, make for you and me? I'd like to share a true story to help put that into perspective. A six year old boy is drawn to pornography. Can you believe it - six years old?! In his teenage years, this same boy is a habitual liar. As a young man in his mid-twenties, he becomes involved in an adulterous affair with a woman, which includes funding an abortion for her. That makes him, in essence, a murderer.

But God changed everything! God in His great grace and rich mercy, rescued this man from his past, present and future sins and set him free in Christ. Now, in old age, through the comfort and counseling of the Holy Spirit, this man is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he wrestles with sin. For example, he struggles with pride, lust and a critical and resentful spirit. All of this can be neatly hidden beneath a well-

rehearsed facade, especially as he comes through the doors of the church building on Sunday morning.

The man I'm telling you about is me; yes, we're talking about your preacher today. That's right; the man who is one of your elders and a Sunday school teacher for some of your children. The reason I shared all of this with you is three-fold. First of all, I want you to see a real-life, close-to-home example of how God in Christ radically changed my life for His glory and for my good. Secondly, this sort of transparency is not meant to revel in our sin, but to bring us to a place of repentance. And last of all, I want us to see that nothing is impossible for God to do for us, with us, through us and in spite of us. And that applies to all of us. No one or no situation is beyond the reach of God's tenderhearted mercy and amazing grace.

Perhaps you and I can appreciate better why John Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace", includes in the first stanza: "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see". In that same regard, Erik Thoennes, pastor, professor and chair of theology at Biola University, says this: "We must see ourselves as dead before we can find life through God's gift of grace." Yes, I was dead in sin, but God made me alive together with Christ. The Lord Jesus made all the difference for me.

How about you? Has Jesus made the difference in your life? If you haven't received God's rich mercy and great love through trusting Christ, then you're dead in your sins, a follower of Satan, a child of wrath. All of that could change today. Right now, God is able to change everything for His glory and for your eternal good. No longer dead in sin, but alive together with Christ. No longer a follower of the devil, but a follower of Christ. No longer a child of wrath, but a child of God. Won't you trust Him today?

And what about those of us who have been trusting Jesus, perhaps for decades? Are we still embracing the good news of the gospel with joy? Does it make a difference in the routine, perhaps mundane, day-to-day life that we've been made alive together with Christ and seated as His child in the heavenly places that only a son or daughter of the King has the privilege to sit? Does our life reflect the enjoyment of God shown in the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus?

### **Conclusion**

I'd like to end with an admonishment, an encouragement and an exhortation. Here's the admonishment. Why do we praise God that we're sons and daughters of the King of kings, but then live like orphans with spiritual amnesia? It's as if we've forgotten we've been made alive together with Christ and been raised up with Him in the heavenly places. When life is difficult, evil is all around us and we're frightened and alone; why are we running away from Christ Jesus and not to Him? Are we afraid to say, "All I have is Christ."?

Now for the encouragement. Remember, God has the perfect solution to the age-old problem of sin. He has promised to do away with this old, bruised and broken world and bring in the new heavens and the new earth when Christ returns. God is in the business of changing everything through Christ, including you and me. Jesus is the only One who can transform messed up

people like us, and by His rich mercy and great love make us right with God. That's really good news! That's the gospel. That's the message of the cross.

Finally, here's the exhortation. Live in joyfulness; the believer is alive in Christ, which means when life is difficult - persevere, fight for joy and stand firm on God's Word. Live in thankfulness; God changes everything for His glory and for the good of His people; changing people like you and me who are undeserving of His grace and mercy. Live in freedom; know full well that only God in Christ has the perfect solution to our biggest problem. Live in celebration; enjoying God as He shows the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus today, tomorrow and in the coming ages. And lastly, live in victory, knowing the words "but God" are two words that change everything! Amen.