

EPHESIANS

A Theological Commentary for Preachers

Abraham Kuruvilla



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അങ്ങയായ് ദൈവത്തെ സ്തുതിക്കുന്നു!

To my father
who exemplified for me
the fatherhood
named after
the Father in heaven

സകല പിതൃത്വത്തിനും പേർ വരുവാൻ കാരണമായ
പിതാവിന്റെ സന്നിധിയിൽ ഞാൻ മുട്ടുകുത്തുന്നു.

Ephesians 3:14-15

PERICOPE 3

Church: Demonstration of Divine Grace

Ephesians 2:1–10

[Gentiles' Former and Present Situation; Good Works Displaying God]

REVIEW, SUMMARY, PREVIEW

Review of Pericope 2: In Eph 1:15–23, Paul thanks God for his readers' faith and love, and he prays that they may know God, i.e., the hope of their calling and the magnificence of their status as God's inheritance. As well, he prays that they would comprehend God's great power manifest in them, as the exalted Christ, above all other cosmic powers, is installed the head of the church, and the church is made his body and fullness.

Summary of Pericope 3: The third pericope of Ephesians (2:1–10) paints a dire picture: the state of unbelievers. Their lives are controlled by evil powers, by the dictates of the world, and by their own fleshly appetites. Unbelievers are marked by disobedience, and are deserving of the wrath of God. But God, in his mercy and love, saves them by grace through faith, co-enlivening, co-raising, and co-seating them with Christ in the heavenlies: co-exalted with their Savior! And all this for the purpose of displaying to the cosmos the attributes of God—his rich mercy, great love, and surpassingly rich grace and kindness—by believers doing the good works already prepared by God for them to do.

Preview of Pericope 4: The next pericope, Eph 2:11–22, depicts unbelievers being brought from the outside to inside the community of

God's people, by the work of Christ. The barrier of the condemnation of sin was removed by Christ's atonement, thus unifying all (believing) humanity in peace into a single body to God, one that is now being grown into the very dwelling of God.

3. Ephesians 2:1–10

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3

3 Believers, once lost in sin, influenced by the world, evil powers, and their own flesh, and deserving of divine wrath, who were saved by grace through faith, now share in Christ's exaltation, demonstrating to the universe God's mercy, love, grace, and kindness, as they undertake good works (2:1–10).

- 3.1 The lifestyle of believers prior to salvation—lost in sin, influenced by the world, evil powers, and their own flesh—is deserving of divine wrath (2:1–3).
- 3.2 Believers in Christ, saved by grace through faith, share in the privileges of Christ's exaltation, and demonstrate to the universe God's initiative in extending mercy, love, grace, and kindness (2:4–7).
- 3.3 God's initiative operating in the whole process of salvation is for the eternal, cosmic demonstration of the greatness of his grace as believers undertake good works (2:8–10).

OVERVIEW

According to Best, the next few pericopes are a sort of narrative, telling the story of the move of Gentile unbelievers to Christianity (Eph 2:1–10), their assimilation with the people of God (2:11–22), and how God plans to use them, specifically to make known his grand and glorious plan of consummating all things in Christ (3:1–13).¹ While the first two pericopes described the privileged status of believers in the plan of God, this pericope (2:1–10) and the next (2:11–22) remind the believers of the Ephesian church of their state prior to obtaining God's gracious blessing. Pericope 3 (2:1–10) portrays their past condition of death, sinfulness, and fleshly evil, in contrast to their current experience of divine mercy, grace, and love that saved and exalted them. Pericope 4 (2:11–22), likewise, depicts their prior status of separation from the community of God, in contrast to their present state of membership in a new body, the church, the product of God's reconciling work.² Pericope 5 (3:1–13), using the paradigm of the apostle himself, will demonstrate how believers are co-opted into playing a key role in furthering God's grand consummation program.

There are strong echoes here of Pericope 2 (1:15–23): resurrection and exaltation/session (1:20; 2:5–6); "heavenlies" (1:20; 2:6); evil influences ("age/course," "rule/ruler," and "authority," occur in 1:21 and 2:2); "working" (of God in 1:19–20; of the evil spirit in 2:2); the age to come (1:21; 2:7); "surpassing" ("greatness of His power,"

1. Best, *Ephesians*, 198.

2. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 85.

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1:19; “riches of His grace,” 2:7). Similarities between this pericope and Pericope 1 (1:1–14) include the mentions of “riches” (1:7 and 2:4, 7); “grace” (1:6, 7 and 2:5, 8); and “Beloved”/“love” and “loved” (1:6 and 2:4). As well, there are contrasts between Pericope 3 and Pericope 1: “sons of disobedience” (2:2) and “children of wrath” (2:3) vs. sonship (1:5); “desires/will” of the flesh (2:3) vs. “will” of God (1:1, 5, 9, 11).

A number of contrasts are visible within this pericope, 2:1–10, itself, that develops its thrust: “dead” in sin (2:1, 5) vs. “co-enlivened”³ (2:5); following the “course of this world” and the dictates of the “the ruler of the authority of the air, [the ruler] of the spirit that is now working the sons of disobedience” (2:2) vs. being related intimately to Christ and exalted with him in the heavenlies (2:5–6); God’s wrath (2:3) vs. God’s mercy, love, grace, and kindness (2:4, 5, 7); and finally, the contrast in lifestyles between those who once “walked” in the evil way, according to the bidding of evil powers that are now in subjection to Christ (2:1–2), and those who are now to “walk” in God’s way (2:10).

Gombis sees a pattern in the structure of the larger swathe of text, 1:20–2:22. In ancient Near Eastern mythology, warfare between deities concluded with the victor being proclaimed preeminent in the pantheon of gods. Subsequently, a temple or palace was erected for the triumphant one where his/her devotees engaged in celebrating the honors of the triumph and the deity’s ascendancy. This ideological pattern of divine warfare included these elements: conflict, victory, kingship, house-/temple-building, and celebration—a typical framework in the ancient world to account for the supremacy of a particular god. This stylistic layout also appears to be followed in 1:20–2:22.⁴

Ephesians 1:20–2:22	Elements of Victorious Warfare
1:20–23	Lordship
2:1–16	Conflict–victory
2:17	Victory shout
2:18	Celebration
2:19–22	House-/temple-building

The bold claim of 1:20–23, that Jesus Christ had been exalted to the position of cosmic lordship, is defended in 2:1–16, with the vindication of his credentials as triumphant over all other powers. These hostile forces that held humanity bondage (2:1–3) were defeated by Christ, and their captives were freed from death, raised, and exalted, demonstrating divine victory to conquered foes (2:4–7)—a triumph accomplished entirely by this strong one’s initiative and power (2:8–10). With this victory, a new humanity of believers that transcended racial and national divides and that overcame these schisms was created—the conqueror’s subjects unified as one citizenry (2:11–16). A victory

3. Or “made us alive together with.” Throughout, I have translated Greek words beginning with *συν-* (*syn*, the preposition “with”) rather woodenly, by prefixing the corresponding English words with “co-” to reflect the structure of the original word.

4. Gombis, “Ephesians 2,” 405–8. He notes as examples, the Ugaritic Baal Cycles, and the *Enuma Elish*, as well as Exod 15; Pss 24, 46; and Rev 12, besides Eph 1:20–2:22.

shout proclaimed the peace so brought about (2:17), followed by the celebration of access to this God (2:18). Thereupon, the construction of a new temple began—the church, the locus where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit (2:19–22).⁵

The current pericope (Pericope 3, 2:1–10), with two sentences, 1:1–7 and 1:8–10, is bounded on either side by περιπατεῖν, *peripatein*, “to walk” (in 2:2 and 2:10).⁶ As well, “dead in transgressions and sins” is found in 2:1 and 2:5, and “by grace you have been saved” in 2:5 and 2:8, tying it all together as a cohesive unit. In terms of development, 2:1–3 details the Ephesian believers’ earlier sin-ridden status; 2:4–5, their salvation (and God’s mercy, love, and grace); 2:6, their exalted status in Christ; 2:7, God’s purpose in this exaltation; and 2:8–10, the gracious working of God in their lives.⁷ The emphatic focus upon the work of God in every facet of the Christian’s life is impossible to miss here.

3.1 Ephesians 2:1–3

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3.1

3.1 The lifestyle of believer prior to salvation—lost in sin, influenced by the world, evil powers, and their own flesh—is deserving of divine wrath (2:1–3).

TRANSLATION 3.1

- 2:1 *And while you were dead in your transgressions and sins,*
 2:2 *in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, [the ruler] of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience,*
 2:3 *among whom we all also formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, performing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, as also [were] the rest;*

NOTES 3.1

- 3.1 *The lifestyle of believer prior to salvation—lost in sin, influenced by the world, evil powers, and their own flesh—is deserving of divine wrath.*

One important observation to start with: the first person plural “you,” in 2:1, and the second person plural “we,” in 2:3, do not designate Gentiles and Jews, respectively. There has been no reason, thus far, to suspect any such ethnic discrimination on Paul’s

5. Gombis, “Ephesians 3:2–13,” 315.

6. “To walk” is a Semitism that means “to live,” primarily in a moral and ethical fashion: Gen 17:1; Ps 1:1; Isa 33:16; Micah 6:8; etc. (using הלך, *hllk*, “to walk”); so also in the NT, employing περιπατέω (*peripateō*, “to walk”): Eph 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17 (×2); 5:2, 8, 15; Col 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; etc.

7. Though Pericope 2 is quite logical in layout, Thielman confesses that its ideas are “expressed in a syntactically disjointed way, probably betraying the occasional and oral nature of the letter’s origin” (*Ephesians*, 119). No doubt, this somewhat ad hoc feel compounds the emotive power of the content.

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part. In fact, there is a back and forth shift between first and second person plural nouns in this pericope.

2:1–2	Second person plural
2:3–7	First person plural
2:8–9	Second person plural
2:10	First person plural

Moreover 2:1 is repeated in 2:5 with the only difference being the pronoun, suggesting the general equivalence of these pronouns and the persons so indicated. Thus the first person plural simply denotes Paul including himself among those who were once in sin—the plight of every believer in times past (notice the emphasized “we *all*” in 2:3)—but are now in Christ.

The opening “and” followed by a participle (giving a temporal sense: “while you were dead,” 2:1), and the succession of clauses in 2:2–3, leave 2:1–3 as a dangling, incomplete sentence. In fact, 2:1 is repeated in 2:5 to clarify where Paul was going with that derailed train of thought, and to get it back on track. Nonetheless, the incompleteness achieves a suspenseful tension that is resolved only with the disjunctive “but” in 2:4 and the three main verbs in 2:5–6.

The life of non-Christians is characterized in this pericope as one of death—death to God, i.e., a lack of response to God or anything related to God: they were dead in their “transgressions and sins.”⁸ There are four ἐν-clauses in 2:2–3: “in which [i.e., in transgressions and sins] you formerly walked,” “in the sons of disobedience,” “in/among whom [i.e., in/among the sons of disobedience] we also formerly lived,” and “in the lusts of our flesh.” The flesh is that ethical entity in humans that opposes God and is irredeemable and incorrigible, constantly battling the indwelling Spirit (in believers) to have its way (Rom 8:5–8; Gal 3:3; 5:16–17). Being “in the flesh” is to be in a sphere of existence in which one is unable to please God (Rom 8:8). In Gal 5:16–24, the “lusts of the flesh” are contrasted with the “fruit of the Spirit.” “All humankind has chosen willfully and thoughtfully to live among the sons of disobedience and to act on their rebellious cravings, desires, and thoughts.”⁹

This is the only occurrence of θέλημα (*thelēma*, “desire/will,” Eph 2:3) in this letter that stands for the desire of humanity, specifically that of the flesh and of the mind; elsewhere it indicates the “will” of God (1:1, 5, 9, 11; 5:17; 6:6).¹⁰ Thus, “desires of the flesh and of the mind” emphasizes the anti-God stance and activities of the “sons of disobedience” and the “children of wrath” (2:2–3). And, in light of Paul’s later concern that believers do not lapse into the sexually immoral conduct characteristic of the

8. The phrase “transgressions and sins” is characteristic of the redundant style in Ephesians (already seen in 1:4, 8, 17, etc.).

9. *Ibid.*, 127.

10. The combination of “flesh” and “mind” in 2:3 is another of the typical redundancies in this letter. “Rather than making fine anthropological distinctions, this language reinforces the comprehensive picture of alienation from God outside of Christ” (Fowl, *Ephesians*, 71).

“sons of disobedience” (5:3–6), it is possible that the “desires” here also point to some inappropriate sexual behavior.¹¹

All of this paints the hopeless predicament of unbelievers, mired as they are in the depths of degrading evil. And, prior to regeneration, the entire sphere of the Ephesians’ life was governed by evil that affected their environment (they lived “according to the course of this world,” 2:2) and their inclinations (“the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” 2:3), and by the evil influences of a nefarious foe (“the ruler of the power of the air, [the ruler] of the spirit that is now working,” 2:2).¹² The “*ruler* of the *authority* of the air” (2:2) employs words (and cognates of words) that had shown up in 1:21 to describe hostile powers. There, however, it was God’s power “working” to overcome these forces (1:20); here, in the pre-Christ “age,” it is the evil powers that are in ascendancy, “working” in unbelievers (2:2). So powerful are the influences of these evil beings that their victims are referred to as “sons of disobedience,” people characterized by disobedient lives, “rebels against the authority of God who prefer to answer the promptings of the archenemy.”¹³ Fowl observes wryly that the “sons of disobedience” are quite obedient—just not obedient to *God*. “The picture painted in 2:2 is of people who are in the thrall of forces opposed to God. Satan has captivated them; they are under Satan’s dominion.”¹⁴ And the result—divine punishment: the “sons of disobedience” are also “children of wrath” (2:3).

In sum, the sphere of unbelievers’ existence was that of “transgressions and sin” (2:1), “in which” they used to walk, the ethical realm to which they belonged (2:2). And implicated in this mess are the “world” and the “[evil] ruler” (external influences; 2:2), and the “flesh/mind” (internal influence; 2:3)—a total pervasiveness of sin in every aspect of their lives. This was a dire situation, indeed! That this was true of such people “by nature” (2:3) indicates that humanity is *born* dead to God.¹⁵ The inherent sinfulness of humankind is indicated in that expression (Rom 5:12, 19; Job 14:1–4; 15:14; Pss 51:5; 58:3; Jer 3:25; 2 Esd 7:68, 118); born with the “flesh,” humans are born sinful. “Unbelievers are ‘dead,’ not because of a succession of sins which brought death,

11. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 126.

12. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 155–56. Likely the mention of a “ruler” indicates a hierarchical ordering of entities in the dark realm under some authority. The word translated “course” in Eph 2:2 is αἰών, *aiōn*, that also means “age.” The word had already been employed in 1:21 and will show up again in 2:7; 3:9, 11, 21. More than a chronological era, it means “course” or “mode of existence,” one that is anti-God and alien to his standards. The “air” in which this evil power operates (2:2) is that intermediate space between heaven and earth, ostensibly the theater of evil spirits. Plutarch, *Moralia* 274b (“Roman Questions,” 40), noted that the “open air” is “full of gods and spirits”; likewise, Philo, *De gigantibus* 1.6, who observed that demons hover in the “air.” But Christ is located “far above” this arena (Eph 1:21; 4:10), and all of those evil powers are located under his feet (1:22).

13. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 161. This labeling of a person as a “son of X” is a Hebraism that denotes one’s “dominant characteristic or affiliation . . . a fundamental disposition” (see Acts 4:36, where Barnabas is named the “son of encouragement”; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 69–70). So also “children of wrath” in Eph 2:3. “Wrath” and “sons of disobedience” are also found together in 5:6.

14. *Ephesians*, 70.

15. Death as penalty for sin is oft noted in the Bible: Gen 2:16–17; 3:3–4; Lev 18:5; Deut 30:19; Rom 1:32; 5:12–14, 18–21; 6:23; 7:9–11; 8:2, 13; 1 Cor 15:56; Col 2:13; Rev 3:11.

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but because they have never come alive as believers. . . . ‘Children of wrath by nature’ thus describes ‘a permanent condition’ in the relation of unbelievers to God.”¹⁶

3.2 Ephesians 2:4–7

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3.2

3.2 Believers in Christ, saved by grace through faith, share in the privileges of Christ’s exaltation, and demonstrate to the universe God’s initiative in extending mercy, love, grace, and kindness (2:4–7).

TRANSLATION 3.2

2:4 *but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*
2:5 *even while we were dead in transgressions, co-enlivened [us] with Christ—by grace you have been saved—*
2:6 *and co-raised and co-seated [us] in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,*
2:7 *in order that in the coming ages He might demonstrate the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus;*

NOTES 3.2

3.2 *Believers in Christ, saved by grace through faith, share in the privileges of Christ’s exaltation, and demonstrate to the universe God’s initiative in extending mercy, love, grace, and kindness.*

Finally, in 2:4–6 we come to the three main verbs of the single sentence that comprises 2:1–7, describing three divine operations, each prefixed with *συν-* (*syn-*, the preposition “with,” translated as the prefix “co-”): *συνεζωοποίησεν*, *συνήγειρεν*, *συνεκάθισεν* (*synezōpoiēsen*, *synēgeiren*, *sunekathisen*, “co-enlivened,” “co-raised,” “co-seated”; 2:5, 6). All three indicate identification with Jesus Christ with whom believers were enlivened (or made alive), raised, and seated—all of these happened also to Christ in 1:20. Thus these actions of God may be considered further expressions of divine power, continuing the theme from Pericope 2 (1:19–20).¹⁷

Paul’s goal in this pericope is to mark a contrast between the past (“dead,” 2:1) and the present (“alive,” 2:5): twice he uses “formerly” (2:2, 3). Once walking according to world, controlled by evil forces, and indulging in fleshly lusts, by nature doomed for wrath (2:1–3), they are now loved and engraced so as to be made alive with Christ, raised with Christ, seated with Christ, in the heavenlies in Christ (2:4–6; below). The old “course” is of the world and in sin (2:2); but soon comes a new age that is of Christ and in the “heavenlies” (2:6). Notice also the contrast between “by nature” (2:3) and “by grace” (2:5, 8). The destinations of the two groups are diametrically opposite—one

16. Best, *Ephesians*, 211. Of its thirty-six instances in the NT, only in five does *ὀργή* (*orgē*, “wrath”) refer to human wrath; the rest indicate God’s (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 323).

17. The three *συν-*compounded words are found only here and in Luke 22:55; Col 2:12, 13; 3:1 in the NT; they are rare in classical Greek literature and even in the LXX.

is doomed for divine wrath (2:3), the other is the recipient of God’s mercy, love, grace, and kindness (2:4, 5, 7, 8). Believers have moved from one to another. One gets the sense that there has been a change of lineage: from doomed “by nature” to exalted “in Christ.” The extensive recounting of “[t]he gravity of their previous condition [2:1–3] . . . serves to magnify the wonder of God’s mercy.”¹⁸

“You were dead” (2:1), *but God* “made us alive” (2:4). “Children of wrath” (2:3) have now become God’s children, saved by grace through faith. Indeed, to underscore the plight of unbelievers prior to this divine intervention, the wording of 2:1 is repeated: “even while we were dead in your trespasses.” The first person plural ensures that Paul himself is counted amongst those now receiving God’s mercy, love, grace, and kindness. The magnitude of divine mercy is described as “rich” (πλούσιος, *plousios*, 2:4); God’s kindness is described likewise (πλοῦτος, *ploutos*, “riches,” 2:7).¹⁹ This was no miserly donation out of pity, but a lavish gift of grace made in love.

What a shared destiny—what is true of Christ, is now also true of believers! Indeed, it is only because of their identification in Christ that believers in him are enlivened, raised, and seated with him. Even though the compound συν-verbs indicate the co-experience with Christ, the point is reinforced by the addition of the phrases “with Christ” and “in Christ” in 2:5, 6, denoting the sphere in which this divine enlivening, raising, and seating of believers occurs. The similarities of the raising up and seating of Christ and that of believers are striking (1:20; 2:6). While “power” is not mentioned here in Pericope 3, there can be no doubt that these parallels signal that the same divine might that worked in Christ (1:19–20a) is also working in believers. The identification of believers with Christ is extensive, including the sharing of his destiny. With Christ in the heavenlies, with him “far above” every inimical power—all subjected under his feet (1:21–22)—believers, too, are in a position of superiority over these hostile forces. Thus, their bondage to the world, the evil ruler, and the flesh (2:2–3) has been broken in this identification with Christ. No longer does the child of God have to succumb to these influences of evil. Of the co-seating with Christ, Arnold notes that “there is no other theological construct which could so effectively and vividly communicate to the readers their access to the authority and power of the risen Lord.”²⁰ Yet the battle continues (and equipment for this conflict is provided in Ephesians 6) as long as the flesh remains—i.e., it is lifelong. Thus, victory is *already* achieved, *but not yet*.

18. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 158.

19. God as gracious and compassionate and merciful echoes as a theme in the OT and Jewish literature: Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:5, 15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Sir 2:11; etc. These are reiterations of what is almost a confessional formula, first articulated by Yahweh himself in Exod 34:6.

20. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 148. It is to be noted that the seating of believers in the heavenlies is not at God’s right hand as it was for Christ (1:20): that is obviously a seat reserved for a special person. There is another difference between what has happened to the saved and the Savior: believers’ experience of being enlivened, raised, and seated is a positional status (at least for now, in this age); Christ’s was an actual resurrection and exaltation.

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This salvation by grace (2:5; also 2:8) includes the enlivening, raising, and seating of believers with Christ, as well as rescue from bondage to sin and from divine wrath.²¹ The unique perfect periphrastic structure (verb of being + anarthrous participle) to describe salvation, ἐστὲ σεσωσμένοι (*este sesōmenoi*, “you have been saved,” 2:5), emphasizes salvation with its continuing state and ongoing benefits. God’s grace not only saves (justifies), but also continues to sanctify believers (and will one day glorify them, as well). And of course, it is a *divine* passive—God is the one doing all the saving.²² While aorist verbs are used to describe the making alive, raising up, and seating with Christ, salvation employs a perfect verb, indicating the special nature of this endeavor. With its clear past indication, the perfect pulls the aorists (“co-enlivened,” “co-raised,” and “co-seated”) into the past as well—these are being considered as already accomplished divine undertakings.²³ In any case, by these stunning actions undertaken by God, believers have already become partners with Christ in the events of redemptive history.

For [Paul], Christ’s death was a death to the old order, to the powers of this age, including sin, and his resurrection was a coming alive to a new order, in which he functioned as Lord with the power of God. Christ’s death and resurrection changed the power structures in history. For believers to have died and been raised with Christ was the equivalent of having been transferred from the old dominion to the new, because in God’s sight they had been included in what had happened to Christ. The fact of temporal distance created no major problem for Paul because he did not think of individuals as isolated from the power sphere in which they existed, but rather viewed present existence as continuing to be determined by the events on which it was founded. He saw the new dominion as a whole as participating in those events of Christ’s death and resurrection through its representative head.²⁴

This is incredible: “sons of disobedience” and “children of wrath,” who were fraternizing with the enemies of God (2:1–3), are now, in Christ Jesus, afforded all the benefits and privileges that appertain to God’s Son!

One striking element in this account of salvation is the absence of any mention of the cross or Christ’s atoning work, unlike in Rom 5:6–11 or even Col 2:11–15, which is otherwise quite similar to Eph 2:5–6 and its surrounding context. Moreover, in the seven undisputed Pauline letters, there is significant attention paid to believ-

21. “Grace” is a major theme of this letter, occurring in 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24. It means unmerited or undeserved favor—“favour towards men contrary to their desert” (Burton, *Galatians*, 424).

22. In all of these divine transactions described in 2:4–10, God’s initiative resounds throughout. As Best rightly noted, “[w]e can arrange neither to be born nor to be reborn” (*Ephesians*, 215).

23. A future actual resurrection for believers waits: Rom 8:23, 29; 11:15; 1 Cor 15:12–58; 2 Cor 4:16–5:10; Phil 3:21; 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Tim 2:11, 18. The co-seating with Christ likely indicates the future co-reign of the believer with him: Matt 13:43; Rom 8:17, 30; 1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5. Thus Eph 2:6 is another example of a realized eschatology—a future event considered as having been actualized in the past. Unlike the undisputed Pauline letters, “Ephesians clearly emphasizes the realized aspect of the tension” (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 137).

24. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 108.

ers dying or suffering with Christ (Rom 6:5–6; 1 Cor 1:18–2:5; 4:8–17; 5:7–8; 6:7; 9:19–23; 10:31–11:1; 2 Cor 4:7–12; 8:8–9; Gal 2:19; Phil 3:10; 1 Thess 2:14–15; Phlm 1). However in Ephesians, such an emphasis is lacking, and that might explain the absence of any statement about the cross (though see 1:7: “redemption through His blood”; and 3:1, 13; 6:20, for Paul’s suffering for the cause of Christ; but there are no *συν*- words that indicate believers co-suffering or co-dying with Christ, as there are in Rom 6:3, 4, 6; 8:17). The emphasis in this pericope, and in the one before, on evil powers and their incapacitation fits the focus here on resurrection and exaltation, rather than on death and suffering.²⁵

3.3 Ephesians 2:8–10

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3.3

3.3 God’s initiative operating in the whole process of salvation is for the eternal, cosmic demonstration of the greatness of his grace as believers undertake good works (2:8–10).

TRANSLATION 3.3

- 2:8 *for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not of yourselves, [but] the gift of God;*
 2:9 *not of works, so that no one may boast,*
 2:10 *for we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand, so that we may walk in them.*

NOTES 3.3

- 3.3 *God’s initiative operating in the whole process of salvation is for the eternal, cosmic demonstration of the greatness of his grace as believers undertake good works.*

This salvation wrought by God was no private act done under cover, but a public demonstration, even proof (the verb, ἐνδείχνυμι, *endeichnymi*, “to show” can also mean “to prove”) of divine grace and kindness—a display for all eternity on a cosmic scale.²⁶ This was the goal of God’s co-enlivening, co-raising, and co-seating of believers with Christ. “It can be said that if the raising of Christ from death to sit in the heavenly realms was the supreme demonstration of God’s surpassing [ὑπερβάλλον, *hyperballon*, 1:19] power, then the raising of believers from spiritual death to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms is the supreme demonstration of God’s surpassing [ὑπερβάλλον,

25. See Thielman, *Ephesians*, 136–37.

26. Three ἐν (*en*, “in”) phrases again show up in 2:7: “in the coming ages,” “in kindness,” and “in Christ Jesus,” all modifying the verb “demonstrate” (three other ἐν phrases also occurred in 2:2–3; see above). The plural “ages” in 2:7 indicates “one age supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach,” so that “[t]hroughout time and in eternity the church, this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness” (Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 288).

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2:7] grace.”²⁷ Thus, God’s concern is not just individuals or even the community of his people; it involves the whole of creation, the entire universe to which his grace is put on display. According to Lincoln, there are three implications of divinely wrought salvation: a future is assured, for the new order that has commenced; God is continuing to work in believers, displaying his grace for all eternity; and the magnificence of what God has done becomes clearer as time marches on, its fullness to be revealed in the eschaton.²⁸ All of this is part of the consummation of all things in Christ, for the glory of God (1:6, 12, 14), the ultimate goal.

In structure, 2:8a makes an assertion, followed by 2:8b and 2:9a, each a negative statement, but with some extra information added: “this not of yourselves, [but] the gift of God” (2:8b), and “[this] not of works, so that no one may boast” (2:9a). The referent of “this” in 2:8 (and of “this” implied in 2:9) is best taken as referring to the entire process of God’s saving work.²⁹ God’s glorious salvation is, all of it, a gift from God. Paul pointedly makes it clear by a deviation from normal word order: 2:8c literally has “of God the gift,” thus juxtaposing “of yourselves” with “of God”—making 2:8bc literally read “and this not of yourselves, *of God* the gift.”³⁰

There is no doubt at all about the universality of both the predicament of sin and the provision of God’s salvific grace to *all* who believe, “by faith” (2:8). While the salvation graciously offered is universal in its provision, it is not universal in its application, for the instrument of that salvation is faith on the part of the believer.³¹ “Although it is tempting to think of salvation on the model of some transaction between God and believers, there is nothing humans can do to evoke God’s salvation or to earn it. In the societies of late capitalism, where almost every encounter can be reduced to a set of transactions between autonomous agents, this is a hard notion to accept.”³² But salvation is neither initiated by human effort (2:8), nor is it a reward for human good deeds (2:9).³³ How could it be, when humans are “dead,” controlled by the world, evil pow-

27. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 110.

28. From *ibid.*, 111.

29. The antecedent of the neuter τοῦτο (*touto*, “this,” 2:8) is likely not πίστεως (*pisteōs*, “faith”) or χάριτί (*chariti*, “grace”), both of which are feminine. Neither can “this” refer to ἔστε σεσωσμένοι (*este sesōsmenoi*, “you are saved”), which employs a masculine participle. Also notice that οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων (*ouk ex ergōn*, “not of works”) in 2:9 is parallel to οὐκ ἐξ ἑμῶν (*ouk ex hymōn*, “not of yourselves”) in 2:8. If the latter qualifies τοῦτο, then so does the former, by parallelism. In that case, if τοῦτο referred to faith in 2:8, to say in 2:9 that “faith is not of works” is tautological. It would make better sense to say that *salvation*—the whole package—is “not of works,” making “this” in 2:8 also refer to salvation (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 143n2). It might well be that Paul could also have been thinking of the neuter τὸ σωτήριον (*to sōtērion*, “salvation,” as used in 6:17). Hoehner observes that τοῦτο frequently points backwards, not forwards in this letter: 1:15 referring to 1:3–14; 3:1 referring to 2:11–22; and 3:14 referring to 3:1–13. So, “[r]ather than any particular word it is best to conclude that τοῦτο refers back to the preceding section,” 2:4–8a, and especially 2:8a, salvation-by-grace-through-faith (*Ephesians*, 343).

30. Interestingly enough, “gift” does not occur anywhere else in the Pauline letters.

31. *Ibid.*, 341. Also coming into play in all this is divine choice and predestination (1:5, 11).

32. Fowl, *Ephesians*, 79.

33. For salvation “not of works,” also see 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5. For works as opposed to faith, see Rom 3:20, 28; 4:1–5; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:2–5, 7, 9.

ers, and the flesh, and headed to suffer divine wrath (2:1–3)?³⁴ Anglican Archbishop William Temple once said: “All is of God: the only thing of my very own which I can contribute to redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.”³⁵

As was noted, this pericope begins with how these saved ones *once* used to “walk” (2:2); it ends with how they *now* should “walk” (2:10). Thus “good works” in 2:10 is the diametric opposite of “trespasses and sins” in 2:1. Notice the parallels:

2:1–2	τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις (<i>tois paraptōmasin kai tais hamartiais</i>) “in transgressions and sins	... ἐν αἷς ... <i>en hais</i> ... in which	ποτε περιεπατήσατε (<i>pote periepatēsate</i>) you formerly walked”
2:10	ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς (<i>epi ergois agathois</i>) “for good works	... ἐν αὐτοῖς ... <i>en autois</i> ... in them	περιπατήσωμεν (<i>peripatēsōmen</i>) we may walk”

Thus, though salvation is not “of works” (2:9), the outcome is *for* works (2:10). Works are not the ground of salvation, but the goal thereof—salvation’s fruit, not its root.³⁶ Thus all of salvation—justification *and* sanctification³⁷—is a divine operation of grace, for God it is who has “prepared beforehand” those good works for them to perform (2:10).³⁸ That grace is involved in both facets of salvation (justification, 2:8–9; sanctification, 2:10) is also clear from the syntax of 2:8–10. Two γὰρ (*gar*, “for”) statements (2:8–9 and 2:10), each including a ἵνα (*hina*, “so that”) clause, expand 2:7 and explain why God’s grace is demonstrated. Firstly, “for by grace” those who believe—i.e., those who have faith—are saved, “so that no one may boast” (2:8–9). Secondly, divine grace was also offered “for good works,” “so that” believers might “walk in them” (2:10). In both cases, justification and sanctification, God’s initiative of grace stands firm and unshakeable.³⁹

34. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 176.

35. Temple, *Nature, Man, and God*, 401.

36. This is a concept found often in the NT: see Rom 4:5; 1 Cor 1:24; 2 Cor 8:7; 9:8; Gal 5:6; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11; Jas 2:14–26; Rev 1:19; etc. Good deeds are commended in Rom 2:7, 10; 13:3; Acts 9:36; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 6:18; and using another formulation, in 1 Tim 5:25; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Heb 10:24. On the concept of good works as “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5) see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!* 195–207, and *ibid.*, 252–58, for the value of such obedience in the Christian life.

37. Believers’ glorification, too, is of God’s grace as well, as Eph 2:6–7 indicates (also see 1 Cor 1:3–6; 1 Pet 1:10, 13).

38. Adding to the πρό- (*pro-*) words that have been encountered thus far (1:4, 5, 9, 11, 12; see Pericope 1) is yet another in 2:10: προετοιμάζω (*proetoimazō*, “prepare beforehand”). In line with the others, this indicates that God’s preparation of good works for his children to perform has also been planned “before the foundation of the world” (1:4). One might carp that this eliminates human freedom, but are humans *absolutely* free in the first place? “We are always acting under the influence, constraint, and encouragement of things, processes, circumstances, and people outside of ourselves. Sometimes we recognize these influences; often we are unaware of their effects on us. . . . The notion of freedom as freedom from all constraint is simply unintelligible,” not to mention unbiblical (Fowl, *Ephesians*, 81).

39. It is quite likely that Paul intends both justification and sanctification in the saving work of God mentioned in 2:5 and 2:8, without making a temporal distinction between the two. Both are gracious acts of God and both are actualized by the believer’s faith: even the walking in good works is predicated

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This formulation [in 2:10] is an emphatic way of underlining the ethical dimension already present in the assertion of 1:4 that God chose believers before the foundation of the world, in order that they might be holy and blameless before him in love. To say that God has prepared the good works in advance in his sovereign purpose is also to stress in the strongest possible way that believers' good deeds cannot be chalked up to their own resolve, but are due solely to divine grace. It is grace all the way. Even the living out of salvation in good works is completely by grace. But this is not a total determinism. God has prepared the good works in advance "in order that we might live in them." The human activity of "walking" is still necessary; the actual living out of God's purpose in the world has to take place.⁴⁰

In sum, "we are His *workmanship*"—ποίημα (*poiēma*, 2:10), which is used elsewhere by Paul in Rom 1:20, for the creation of the universe. Here, then, is a *second* creation, of sorts, in Eph 2:10. In fact, the verb used here, κτίζω (*ktizō*, "create"), is employed in Ephesians only of the first creation of the universe and for this *second* creation of a new peoples (see 3:9 for the former; 2:10, 15; 4:24 for the latter). In any case, in the NT κτίζω is always used to describe a work of God.⁴¹ The construction in 2:10 is quite emphatic that this is God's doing; literally, "For his workmanship, we are." That marks the critical significance of what is happening in salvation. God is certainly doing an amazing thing, a part of his grand scheme to "consummate all things *in Christ*." Likewise, even here, this "workmanship" of God—believers—are created *in Christ Jesus*.⁴² In other words, the role of believers is nothing less than a participation in God's magnificent scheme for the cosmos in Christ.

SERMON FOCUS AND OUTLINES

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3

3 Believers, sharing Christ's exaltation, demonstrate to the universe God's mercy, love, grace, and kindness as they undertake good works (2:1–10).

The third pericope of Ephesians contrasts the past and present states of believers. Before salvation in Christ, they were "dead" in sins, controlled by evil powers and by the influences of the world and their own flesh, and destined for divine wrath. But God co-enlivened them with Christ, co-raised them with Christ, and co-seated them with Christ in the heavenlies, for this purpose: that they may display the abundance of divine mercy and love, his grace and kindness, through the good works God has already prepared for them to undertake.

and grounded upon faith (the "obedience of faith"). For good works, performed in the power and equipping of God, see: 2 Cor 9:8; Col 1:9–12; 2 Thess 2:16–17; Heb 13:20–21.

40. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 115–16.

41. Besides those verses in Ephesians, see Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; Rom 1:25; Col 1:16; 3:10; 1 Tim 4:3; Rev 4:11 (×2); 10:6.

42. Here, as in most occurrences of the phrase, the sense of "in Christ Jesus" is of the sphere into which believers have been introduced. As a result, all of these magnificent benefits accrue to them.

Possible Preaching Outlines for Pericope 3

- I. PAST: The Status of Unbelievers
 - “Dead” in sin (2:1)
 - Controlled by evil entities (2:2b)
 - Influenced by the flesh and world (2:2a, 3a)
 - Fate: Deserving of divine wrath (2:3b)
- II. PRESENT: The Station of Believers
 - Co-enlivened, co-raised, and co-seated with Christ in the heavenlies (2:4–6)
 - Cause: God’s rich mercy, great love, surpassingly rich grace and kindness (2:4–7)
- III. FUTURE: The Service of Christians
 - Saved by grace through faith as a gift from God (2:8)
 - No grounds for boasting (2:9)
 - Entirely God’s workmanship created in Christ (2:10a)
 - For good works that God himself has already prepared (2:10b)
- IV. *Show off God: do good works!*
 - [For possible unsaved listeners:] Trust in Christ as only God and Savior⁴³
 - [For saved listeners, the church:] Specifics on doing good works⁴⁴

Adjusting the placement of ideas yields another outline that emphasizes the contrast between the state of unbelievers and that of believers:

- I. Ruinous State of Unbelievers
 - “Dead” in sin (2:1)
 - Controlled by evil entities (2:2b)
 - Influenced by the flesh and world (2:2a, 3a)
 - Consequence: God’s wrath (2:3b)
- II. Rich State of Believers
 - Co-enlivened, co-raised, and co-seated with Christ in the heavenlies (2:4–7)
 - Cause: God’s rich mercy, great love, surpassingly rich grace and kindness (2:4–9)
 - Consequence: God’s pleasure in doing the good works he already prepared (2:10b)
- III. *Reveal God: do good works!*
 - [For possible unsaved listeners:] Trust in Christ as only God and Savior
 - [For saved listeners, the church:] Specifics on doing good works

43. Most biblical pericopes do not have a hermeneutical constraint directing the preacher to present the gospel of salvation, but surely this pericope calls for it. Having tracts available, counselors to talk to/with, organizing evangelistic campaigns, etc., would work well as specific application.

44. On the other hand, most biblical pericopes—if not all—*do* have a hermeneutical constraint: their thrusts are directed towards believers—how those already in relationship to God may undertake their divinely mandated responsibility to live lives in a manner pleasing to God. In the context of the demonstration of God’s mercy, love, grace, and kindness, the preacher might give specifics regarding good works that manifest these specific attributes of God.