

Ephesians 2:1 - *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.* I want to go through the whole book. How many did we end with last? There were 31 “you’s” in chapter 1. Everybody who would stand with me and make this a singular, will you please raise your hand? Okay, thank you. We will make it singular even though I’m wrong. I know I’m wrong, but I just don’t want anybody in the world to be able to come up and say that one was singular. And that’s why I’m doing this; I’m really trying to do this strictly. And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

Now, brothers and sisters, the next word is in verse four. *“But God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us”* is actually what comes after that opening sentence. I’m going to read it again, *“and you were dead in your trespasses and sins. But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were...”* let’s do it again, *“we were dead in our trespasses He made us alive,”* thank you very much, *“He made us alive together with Christ.”*

Now I want to go back and read the parentheses. That’s at the end of verse 5. We have how many? 36. All right. Now I’m going to read the parentheses which is verse two through three, *“in which you formally walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience among them, we too all formally live in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.”* Do you see how that’s a parentheses? Paul has a tendency to wander.

Now we’re going to count two and three, see what we’ve got in here. *“In which you formally walked.”* I’m not going to let you have that one. *“According to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”* We don’t want to count that one at all because we’re looking for that which refers to believers. *‘...among them.’* What number is that? 37 *“to also formally live in the lust of our flesh.”* 38, *“indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were”* but there’s a “we” in there isn’t there and it’s really true that I have to agree with you there’s a “we” in there, *“and we were by nature children,”* children, children. How many is that? 40. *“Children of wrath, even as the rest.”* We won’t count that. Okay. *“But God in His mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.”* We’ve already counted that one. *“Even when we were dead in our trespasses and made and made us alive together with Christ.”*

You know, brother, you actually lose your count number in verse one when we get to five, do you understand that? But I’m still going to let you keep them. You’ve lost every one of your singulars when we read long enough. Is that not true? Every one of them, because there’s definitely a “we” there, which would mean he’s speaking in the plural, but some theologians back there would say we’re leaving out the individual salvation of man, and I don’t want to do that.

Now we’ve come to another parentheses, and this one is sometimes included in scripture. Does anybody have a parenthesis in verse five in their book? Okay, good. *“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ.”* Parenthesis, *“by grace you have*

*been saved.*” Parenthesis, we're going to stay singular there. For by grace, you have been saved. Okay. So, I go back and read, *with the great love with which He loved us, and He made us all alive together with Christ and raised us.* Six, what number is that? We're in verse six. ...*raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.*

Now, why are we seated with Him? And I doubt anybody in this room can give me the answer to that based on this book alone. Come on, show your ignorance; you should know on the basis of last night. I'm giving you a big hint. Why are we seated with him? Not because we're in Him. No. Because He has been given to us. It's right in the book; He has been given to us. Therefore, we are seated where He is seated. Okay. You can say because we're in Christ, but I didn't want to do that. I wanted to say because He has been given to the church. We are seated with Him because *we* own Him. *We* own the Lord Jesus Christ. This one who was seated above all things has and His head has been given to the church by the Father. Isn't that unbelievable? Isn't this much more positive? I'm not trying to hide anything negative in this book. It's just a positive book, *and has seated us*, did we count that one? *With Him in the heavenlies. And we're seated with Him in the heavenlies because we're in Him*, but He still is our gift.

*In order that in the ages to come, the Father...* is that the Father or Christ? I've forgotten. ...*the Father might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Now, if you'll stop in verse 7 and just turn around and look at everything else that's been said, then this verse says that in order, that in the ages to come, or we don't know what's out there, but there are going to be some witnesses, I guess, the Father might show everything and everyone in the ages to come His surpassing riches of His grace. And that's everything from chapter one, verse one, right here to verse 7. And His kindness toward you and me who are in the church in Hierapolis in Christ Jesus. He wants to show off His mercies and His kindness.

Now this theme of mercy, kindness, grace, and glory is all the way through the book of Ephesians, and we haven't even touched on it. But God is merciful, He's kind, He's gracious, and there is so much glory in that grace. And in the ages to come, He will show the richness of all that He has done toward the body of Christ. Not toward you, the individual, but toward that girl, toward that assembly you meet with. Those are the dwelling places of the kindnesses and the riches and the glories of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. And we have here another parenthesis. So, I'll go ahead and read beyond the parentheses. ...*towards us in Christ Jesus that we*, and we drop down to verse 10...*for we are His workmanship and...*nope, okay, alright.

I want to just stop here to be very personal. Does anyone in this room remember Howard Butt Jr.? The HEB grocery stores in South Texas were started by a man named Howard Butt Jr., who was saved on the Baylor campus in the great revival that swept this country in my day, when I was a 17-year-old kid. And Howard Butt Jr. could burn down a pulpit when he spoke, and he was a layman. Howard is dead now, but I can get past that purse. I was in the Southern Baptist Retreat ground in North Carolina. The place is called Ridgecrest, North Carolina. That's where all good Baptists go, and young Baptist people go. And he spoke that day. “Oh, we are God's masterpiece.

We are a masterpiece.” Michelangelo, every time he did anything, it was a masterpiece. I already mentioned it was a masterpiece. Boy, what with God to pull off when he decided to make his masterwork that is more beautiful than all of creation.

We corporately are the masterpiece of God. That word can be translated: we are the masterpiece. Now, we've gotten that far counting, is that correct? Well, let me go back to the parentheses. We corporately are His masterpiece. Alright, I'm going back to the parentheses. For by grace, you have been saved through faith. Brother, you're going to get another one. How many do you have now? This might be literally, honestly, a single one. We can't take this one away from you. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith and not of...”* Now, I think you just lost it, brother. Okay. *“For by grace you all have been saved through faith and that not of your own efforts.”*

You are the gift of God. It is not ‘it is the gift of God’; you are the gift of God. ...*that not of yourselves, the gift of God.* It could be that the faith is the gift of God. Either one of them, you're in your great company. Yes, brother, it could very easily be the faith. For that faith is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Or, it's not yourselves; you are the gift of God. I'll take either one; I'll take both. Faith and righteousness are the gift. Okay, we'll take the gift as being faith. Why not? That I cannot even faith Christ. He has to give that to me. Alright, “not as a result of works that no one should boast.” And brother, I'm going to give you one and not back out this time; I'm not lying to you, brother. You have one, and it's clear that no one person can boast. Let's give him a hand, he's got one.

There are brothers and sisters in a body of believers who will boast. I'm just going to get off the subject here and talk. It's just one of those things I've noticed. Did you know egomaniacs don't last long in church life? And they just wander the world telling everybody about how great they are, (singing) “how great I am, how great I am...”

I heard a Chinese brother talk about a brother in China who had been saved, and he was someone who smoked opium. That's the greatest single addiction in the world, I believe. And he, if you came into his house, he'd immediately show you a picture of himself smoking opium, and he was an emaciated person, and then he became a Christian, and he would show you how he looked, the pictures of himself, and how he recovered, but he wouldn't stop, he just kept on talking about his conversion and his conversion and his conversion until finally you began to realize that he was not talking about the Lord at all; he was simply a boastful person.

Well, that's not what this passage is about because those kinds of people don't normally survive in the church, but it is a warning to you and me to not boast that we have gained God's favor. You did not get God's favor, and there's nothing you're gonna do that's going to make Him cuddle up to you. And if you give a lot of money, that's not going to affect God's relationship to you at all. And if you bring a great message, that doesn't make God say, “Wow, I like him.” And if you stop smoking cigarettes, you haven't won God's favor, and anything you do - this is important, because outside these walls, most Christians are doing what they're doing, trying to

carry the favor of God, to get God's attention away from their sinfulness, and their present state, their guilt. The Catholic Church has been raised on people giving money in order for God to like them. I'll give money and build an entire cathedral if you'll do seven Hail Marys for me for the next thousand years in hopes that all these things I've done will get me out of purgatory a little sooner. That is carrying the favor of God.

Brothers and sisters, you can't get any more favorable in the sight of God. You've been His favorite since before creation. You can't get any better in your relationship to God than you are right now. And if you don't believe in the safety of that, then think of how much you put up with your own kids, and this merciful Lord of yours, this merciful, merciful Lord of yours, settled this before you were created.

Now the score is now in reality one to forty-seven, but we're giving you four, just to keep the theologians off our backs. I just want to read this passage again. I'm going to read verse 7. *In order that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand.* I don't want to read any further. I'll come back. I just want to read the parentheses. *“For by grace you all have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. That faith is the gift of God.”* Okay? “And it is not a result of your works, therefore, don't boast about in yourselves.” Alright, I think we've counted everything up to half of verse 10. Is that correct? Okay. For we are His masterpiece. We are one masterpiece, saints: that's a corporate “we”, saints. We were created inside of Jesus Christ for good works.

Now, now, now, now immediately, Gene, you said over there, we were not, and not, and we're not. But here it says good works. What? What? Gene, what? What are the good works? And oh, what am I supposed to do? And what if my works aren't good? And oh, I'm in big trouble again. And I just got out of grace and worked. And then he just blows your little efforts high in the sky and says this. He predestined that you were going to do those good works, and the good works are not of you either; they were predetermined before creation. Now stand up and boast about what you have done for Jesus. He predetermined, He foreknew, He decided beforehand that you were going to do the good works you did. Isn't that wonderful? I mean, how liberating that nobody said to me, don't ever let anybody say to me, but Gene, you have to do good works; no, I don't. I have been predestined to the good works that I will do, and that I have done, and so have you. Isn't it wonderful? Praise the Lord. Let's give the Lord a hand. He is very good.

*For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which He prepared beforehand that we would walk in them.* 48. And now I want to ask you a question. Who does the good works? It is a corporate working of good works predetermined that we, the church, would walk in them in Christ. Therefore, when someone says to you, ‘Do good works,’ you say, ‘No, sir, not me.’ We, a body of believers, do good works. Last week, someone was sick, but I was out of town. You took care of them, but we did good work. This week, I am really mad at half the brothers and sisters of the church. I'm living in sin, I'm not speaking to any of the sisters, and not half the

brothers. Therefore, I am in my flesh, and I'm not having anything to do with any of you this week. That's because I'm immature, sensitive, and unforgiving, but that week, the church did good works. Next week, I'll catch up on it, I'll repent hopefully, and I'll speak to the sisters but not the brothers. We, a body of believers.

Now, if this does not give you a new Christian faith, a new Christian law, a new Christian something or other around, and this is the only way any of us should have ever understood the scripture. I look at that passage, and I think of what has been drained out of that thing, and been put on God's people individually, and I am in awe of the brutality that we have wished off on one another. I have not been predestined to any works; I'm not going to walk in them. I am part of a girl. She's got to do good work because she was predestined to it; she's going to walk in that by nature. It is her nature to do, sir. Thank God.

Now, brothers and sisters, if you could just watch her move, she just does it. Saints in Orlando, someone wrote me a letter the other day, and there was a sister, and she said, The brothers have meetings on Sunday morning. Sometimes they go a long time, and when we see that they're getting close to lunch, sisters all get together, put a meal together for them, and we leave our houses, we get our food together, and we all walk it to the brothers. We put the food down on the floor for them, and the brothers eat lunch. You belong to a church like this, that happens to you all the time. That's just she being a she. That's a girl. The sisters just get together and put a meal together and serve it to the brothers, but who did the good work? She did. Why did she do that? Why? She was predestined to be that way. She can't help it. It is a biological drive. Do you have any biological drives? You have a biological drive, a biological drive to eat, a biological drive to sleep, and other things, and she has a biological drive. She was predestined, predetermined. That's just the way she would be.

Brothers and sisters, if you live a thousand years, you won't hear anything more wonderful, and it's liberating and it's beautiful; that's the way it is. I don't have a biological drive to good works because I'll run myself into the ground and have a complete physical breakdown trying to live up to all this stuff. I cannot live the Christian life, and I cannot do good works, but when I become part of this girl, she does so much.

Just recently, I was in a doctor's office and got to know one of the ladies on the staff there really well. She's a Christian. She's telling me what she did, what was going on, and the more she talked, we had a long conversation, and she was killing herself and quoting verses about how it should be. I said to her sister, You need to take a vacation from being good to other Christians and helping them and she almost went into a spasm. No, I am dead serious. There was terror on her face, and she said, "Oh, I could never do that." And I thought, "Oh, how sad that you can't lay down your compunction, your compulsive drive to do good works.

Sister, give it up. We're tired of you doing all this stuff anyway. I'll tell you something else: it's drawing a lot of attention to one part of the body, which comes down to egotism, to "let's do what comes naturally." Let's be the body of Christ and see what it is we were ordained to do before

the foundation of the world. Isn't this wonderful? Why aren't you standing up on your chairs, cheering the graces and the glories and the kindnesses and the mercies of the glory of His grace?

If anyone thinks that I'm doing some damage to this book in the New Testament, that I am in some way twisting scripture, will you please stand up? I think I'm reading it like it is. Have I invented anything? It's even better than it sounds. Praise the Lord. Thank you, brother. Thank you very much.

Before He comes back. Shall the Lord come soon? I have a strange feeling; I don't want Him to come back. I honestly don't want it because I know, and I knew this even when I was a teenager. When I get really close to death, I'm going to say, "Alright, Lord. Come on back. I don't want to die. Come on now, Lord. Do it, Lord. Now." I don't want Him to come back. Forgive me, I know that I'm supposed to, I read all those verses that said I'm supposed to want Him to come back. Well, those were written during the time when things were looking fairly good. I don't want Him to come back. I want Him to come back when this is, if not the greatest testimony on the earth, at least one that is known.

I want God's people somewhere to have the joy and beauty of living in His life and living in His church without condemnation and the reality of these things, without a bunch of chesty, high-testosterone men going around terrifying sisters and other brothers. I know I'm supposed to want Him to come back, but brother, I don't want Him to come back. Therefore, I can't answer your question honestly. I'm totally prejudiced.

By the way, let me tell you, it's the strangest thing in this world. People have been predicting His return for hundreds of years, but He didn't do it, and yet, they're passing up the one year that should be His return, and that's 1996. If the calendar is off four years, Jesus Christ was born in 4 BC, and if these towheads are really right about the birth of Christ, you know, you got 2000, 2000, 2000, 1000, then in October of 1996, He's coming back, and nobody has even said anything about it. I figured this year there'd be people on the hills, selling their homes. They did that three years ago. Watch October 1996. Why October? Because that's when the Jews celebrate the gathering, and I think all theologians expect them to come back in, you know, late fall, autumn. If you read *The Return* by Gene Edwards, you will notice. Did anybody see it? They were getting all these messages into Houston's space, and one of them said, "You're sure messing up a beautiful autumn day." Did you notice that? It did. I throw things in like that.

So, brother, He may come back this year, and boy, I'm going to be glad it's over with, and I'm looking forward to a transformed body. But I want to perpetrate on all of you the Edwardian view of how to bring the Lord back: We must all stop believing He's coming back. If we will all stop believing He's going to come back, He said, "I will come back at a time when nobody believes I will come back." And our generation has called for more days and written more books than any other in history. How could He possibly come back? Everybody's wanting Him to come back and expecting Him back. Hal Lindsay has just blown everything. Everybody's convinced He's going

to return. Hal, just didn't do that to us. I bet the Lord would have come back if you had written that book.

Okay, we have not been on a scriptural topic for the last five minutes. In case anybody is listening to these tapes, then you don't take anything I've just said seriously. We're in verse eleven. *Therefore, remember that formerly you;* did you get one here? That's right. Well, what is this one, brother? 49. *"Therefore remember that formerly you the Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by the so-called circumcision."* By the way, He doesn't even admit there is a circumcision. He just admits the so-called circumcision. Would you make a point of that? He doesn't say it is. *...performed in the flesh by human hands.* And that's a dig, as over against this thing is done by humans rather than by God. *Remember that you,* is it 51 right here? I know, but is that the number? I didn't actually count the Gentiles, did I? Those are brothers and sisters in that church. Okay, you get it. *Remember that you were at that time,* that's right, *at that time* separate. And this is a group of Christians in Hierapolis.

*You were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.* Man, what a powerful word, *that is from the church and strangers to the covenant of promise.* Are we going to let Him have strangers? No, we're winning this game; we can be graceful. Okay. No. *...to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God on this planet, but now inside of Jesus Christ, you who were formerly far, far away, have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ.* Well, that's us, saints. Now, He may not be speaking of the church here; he may be speaking to a group of individuals to remind them where they were formerly. Nonetheless, we have to know it was plural, and it was addressed to a group of people who got together, who considered themselves the body of Christ. But now, the eternal now of Christ inside of Jesus Christ; *you who were formerly far away have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ. For Christ Himself is our peace.* Alright, that's 54.

I don't think I even need to turn to show you this, but sister, give me a definition of peace. I'll give you a shorter word. Peace is Christ. That's what it says right here. For Jesus Christ is our peace. Now, I'm going to tell you something, and I know it might be a little difficult for you to believe, but I have spent most of my life as a Christian outside the organized church, and I know that there is among ministers and among God's people everywhere a constant struggle that is always there. Now, you may believe me if you wish; you may not believe me if you wish, but I would say the typical brother and sister, and this is not true of everyone, but the typical brother or sister comes into an experience in the body of Christ, and within two to three years, that struggle ends.

Now, that doesn't mean there's still not tension; that doesn't mean everybody goes to sleep and yawns, but that struggle ends, and the satisfaction of knowing you're in church, you're in the body, and the one thing you discover is that all the rest are in a bigger mess than I am. And oh, it's a wonderful burden that you lay down, but you're wrong. You thought you were the world's worst. No, you're just thrown into a body of the world's worst. And oh saints, I tell you, holy ones, that is

such a relief. Golly, they're worse than I am. Well, God must really have mercy on us, then, because, well, not any of these people like to pray. They all like pizza more than they do prayer. And so it goes. I am telling you, I'm exaggerating this, and yes, I'm being humorous, but I am telling you something wonderful. Brothers and sisters, when you come into the body of Christ, somewhere along the way, there is some element of the Christian struggle that ends, and that is because Christ becomes your peace.

*Christ made both groups one.* That's 56, brother. The two groups are 55, but the "one" is number 56. Are you following me? That one is corporate. We could throw a tent down right there, *and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...* And we'll have to stop right there if we plan to eat lunch. I hope that when this weekend is over, you will go home with a new Bible, at least new epistles. And yeah, we're going to go back to suspect some of the ways we've been reading the Gospels.

Brothers and sisters, I have preached harder than this. And I have seen God's people stand on their feet, cheering. I have seen ovations, and I've seen people cry and weep, but in all my ministry, I have never spoken more revolutionary than I am just by reading verses and opening the fact that you and I are learning that we are a herd, we are a flock, we are a tribe, give me another animal word, a school, we are a gaggle, we are a murder - I bet you don't know that one - you do, crows, we are a tribe, we are a people. We are a commonwealth. Every description given to the church is plural. A commonwealth, a nation, a citizenship, a people, a family, a colony, it's always plural.

The church is a plurality, and you, dear child of God, have a right to be in her. And two things are going to have to happen: either we have to get more church planters, or you're going to have to move. Well then, Gene, let's have more church planters because I don't want to move. Well, I'm going to tell you something, my dear brother, the only way we're going to get more church planters is for men called God to humble themselves and get into church life, because I personally am never going to tolerate somebody going out planting churches who's never known church life. And there's not a single man except Apollos in the New Testament but what he knew church life before he knew church planting. And Apollos is at the bottom of my list and yours, and he's really at the bottom of the list of Paul if you know how to read Corinthians. If there had been no Apollos, there might never have been 1st and 2nd Corinthians. It's true; it's absolutely the truth, but brothers, this takes God calling men. In the meantime, you belong in the tribe, in the citizenship, in the commonwealth, in the house, in the bride, and a lot of other things that you're missing out on; the building.