



"BUT GOD!" EPHESIANS 2:1-10

SAM STORMS
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The Times of London, a prominent newspaper in the early 1900s, posed a question to several famous authors, one of whom was the famous G. K. Chesterton. The question was: *"What's wrong with the world today?"* The well-known Chesterton responded with a one-sentence essay: *"Dear Sir, I am."* Whatever else one may think of Chesterton, a Roman Catholic, there can be no doubt as to the biblical and entirely accurate assessment he made of himself. On the other hand, most of us, if asked that question, would likely point to the scourge of abortion or the many notorious serial killers or thieves or genocidal maniacs. But Chesterton understood what the Apostle Paul said here in Ephesians 2:1-10. Or he could have as easily cited Romans 3:10ff. or a multitude of other texts that speak of the depravity of every human heart.

The truth of Chesterton's confession is precisely what makes the two words, *"But God,"* perhaps the most wonderful, encouraging, and hope filled truth that we read in Scripture. In Romans 5, Paul spoke of this same truth: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – **but God** shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). Or consider 1 Corinthians 1:26-27. There Paul states that "not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **But God** chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise."

The first three verses of Ephesians 2 are probably the most direct, pointed, unequivocal declaration in all of Scripture concerning the nature of all human beings apart from the saving grace of Jesus Christ. If you have been among those who bought into the lie that people are by nature good and righteous, these verses will come as a shock to your system. Of course, the great and glorious good news is seen in the first two words of v. 4 – *"But God."* What then follows in vv. 4-10 is a magnificent and breathtaking description of what God has done to graciously overcome our moral depravity and wickedness and set us forth as trophies of his saving mercy. John Stott, now with the Lord, has put it in these terms:

"Against the somber background of our world today Ephesians 2:1-10 stands out in striking relevance. Paul first plumbs the depths of pessimism about man, and then rises to the heights of optimism about God. It is this combination of pessimism and optimism, of despair and faith, which constitutes the refreshing realism of the Bible. For what Paul does in this passage is to paint a vivid contrast between what man is by nature and what he can become by grace" (Stott, 69).

We must never lose sight of either of these truths. If we neglect God's saving grace and become obsessed with the depravity of the human soul, we will fall into despair and cynicism. If we focus on grace and forget the condition from which we have been and are being delivered, we stand in danger of naiveté and presumption.

For every soul burdened with depression, there is a But God! For every conscience shackled by shame, there is a But God! For every person addicted to pornography, there is a But God! For every broken heart, confused mind, disease ridden body, there is a But God! That is our only hope. If there were no But God! we would be eternally enslaved to the horrible portrayal in vv. 1-3 of our condition.

There is a very important reason why you should listen closely to what Paul writes in vv. 1-3 and why you should listen attentively to what I say about what Paul said. The reason is that you won't hear this outside the community of God's people, the church. No newspaper will tell you this. You won't read it in the many blogs and podcasts and internet news sites. Outside of those who happily embrace the name of evangelical you won't hear anything remotely approximating what Paul says. ***What he says is utterly the opposite of what our culture promotes. This paragraph is not very flattering to men and women today, or in any age.*** The only place where you will hear this diagnosis of the human condition is in the Bible. Secular psychology won't portray people as Paul does. Neither will the hosts on Fox News or CNN or the professors on virtually all of our college campuses. You won't find this in the New York Times or any of the more widely watched TV programs.

In Ephesians 1:15-23 Paul prayed that the Spirit would reveal to us the surpassing greatness of God's power toward those who believe, a power exemplified and expressed in the resurrection of Jesus from physical death. That very power, that self-same divine energy, is no less exemplified and expressed in the resurrection of the elect from

spiritual death! Indeed, even as Christ was made alive (1:20) and exalted and seated at the right hand of God (1:20), so also the elect have been made alive (2:5; a reference to the new birth or being born again) and exalted and seated with Christ in the heavenlies (2:6)! In other words, ***what Paul said about Christ in 1:20-21 is now applied to us, the church.*** In sum, Christ's destiny has become ours, because we are spiritually united with him by the grace of God.

Even as there are unmistakable parallels between Christ's destiny (1:19-23) and ours (2:1-7), so also there are unmistakable contrasts between our previous condition outside of Christ and our current state in him. Whereas once we were dead (2:1) we have now been made alive (2:5). Whereas we once followed the ways of the world and were subject to Satan's rule (2:2) we are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies (2:6). Whereas we were once under God's wrath (2:3) we are now the objects of his mercy, grace, love, and kindness (2:4-7).

Our condition before conversion: dead in sin – 2:1-3

In describing our condition before conversion, Paul makes five statements:

(1) *We were dead by reason of (because of) our transgressions and sins* (2:1-2a)

The "and" with which v. 1 opens may be translated "also", or better still, "and you also", i.e., just as Jesus Christ was physically dead and was raised by God's power "you also" were spiritually dead and were raised by his power.

In a fashion quite similar to what we find in Romans 1-3, Paul's description of the sinful condition of humanity extends to everyone. No one is excluded. (1) "***you***" in 2:1-2 = Gentile believers in Ephesus; (2) "***we all***" in 2:3a = Jewish believers, including Paul; and (3) "***the rest***" in 2:3b = all remaining people, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, Paul's description is not restricted to some unusually depraved tribe or degraded segment of society or even the pagan world of his own day. Rather it is the realistic diagnosis of every human being in every age in every corner of the earth.

The word translated "***trespasses***" literally means a false step, a blunder, a crossing over a known boundary. The word translated "***sins***" more literally means missing the mark, falling short of a specified standard. See Rom. 5:20 where they are used interchangeably. As Eadie points out, they "denote every species, form, and manifestation, of intent as well as act, of resolve as well as execution, of inner meditation as well as outer result" (119).

Paul says we were dead "***in***", or ***because of*** transgressions and sins. But this word "***in***" points not simply to the instrument or cause of spiritual death but also to the state or condition of spiritual death "***in***" which people languish.

John Piper has pointed out that Paul doesn't describe us as if we were in the doghouse with God. No, we are in the morgue! The word "***dead***" here is striking and appears to run counter to experience. After all, lots of people who make no Christian profession whatever, people who openly repudiate Jesus Christ, appear to be very much alive. Think about the Olympic athlete whose body is capable of remarkable acts of strength and speed. It seems strange to describe him as "dead." Or consider someone like Albert Einstein or famous atheist Richard Dawkins, men whose intellectual genius is beyond question. Or I could point to numerous film stars whose personalities have earned them multiple millions of dollars. Are people like this "dead"? Yes!

Paul is clearly speaking about spiritual death. Their minds and bodies may be vigorous and lively, they may consider themselves to be alive; they can breathe and think and eat and sleep and run and laugh, but their souls are dead and lifeless because of sin. Once again, here is how John Stott describes them:

"They are blind to the glory of Jesus Christ, and deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They have no love for God, no sensitive awareness of his personal reality, no leaping of their spirit towards him in the cry, 'Abba, Father', no longing for fellowship with his people. They are as unresponsive to him as a corpse. So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living" (Stott, 72).

Paul is not saying that people everywhere are born spiritually alive and over time slowly die, only to be made alive again when they come to faith in Jesus. In other words, he is not thinking of a point in time at which each person dies spiritually. People are ***born spiritually dead*** and remain in that condition until such time as the Holy Spirit regenerates them and makes them alive. I realize how strange that sounds. After all, to be "born" is to experience life. Paul wouldn't disagree with that. His point is that all those who are physically and mentally alive are at the same time spiritually dead.

It would seem that the unregenerate are “dead” in at least two senses: (1) *insensibility* – They lack any awareness of the beauty of Christ and the wonders of God’s grace; the gospel bores them; (2) *incapability* – Because of their fallen condition they are incapable of bringing themselves into spiritual life or even of exercising faith in Jesus.

Paul says that we “walked in” this state of spiritual death (2:2a), i.e., ***we lived in death!*** To “walk” is Paul’s way of referring to ethical conduct, how one lives one’s life (see Gal. 5:16; Rom. 6:4; 8:4; 14:15; 2 Cor. 4:2; Eph. 4:1; 5:2; Phil. 3:17; etc.). Transgressions and sins were the atmosphere in which we lived, in which our existence was enveloped. Lastly, note that twice in vv. 2–3 Paul uses the temporal adverb “once” or “formerly” (NASB) in order that the contrast between what we *were* by nature and what we *are* by grace might be seen.

When I was in seminary back in the 1970’s a friend of mine worked part time at Baylor hospital. For all I know he emptied bed pans to support himself. In any case, one day he escorted another seminary student to the hospital morgue. It was cold and grey and a little scary. As they stood there and looked on the numerous dead bodies, my friend suddenly said: “Preach to them!” Needless to say, unless these corpses were resurrected to life, preaching to them was fruitless. So, too, it is with all of humanity. The only reason why any of us respond in faith to the gospel is because of what Paul says in v. 5 – “God ***made us alive*** together with Christ.” Before the Holy Spirit did his work in us, we were all ***spiritual corpses***.

(2) *We lived in conformity with or patterned after the course of this world – 2:2a*

Literally, we walked/lived according to the “age (*aiōna*) of this world”. The phrase thus “signifies the world existing in that particular span of time. . . . Their behaviour has been determined by the powerful influence of society’s attitudes, habits, and preferences, which were alien to God and his standards” (O’Brien, 159). We were in cultural bondage, embracing the values and expressing the vices of our society. In other words, it simply means that we were in step with the times. Prior to faith in Christ, we felt perfectly at home in the world. We embraced its beliefs and conducted ourselves like the rest of fallen, sinful mankind.

(3) *We lived under the influence of Satan himself – 2:2b*

Satan is described in the gospels as “the ruler of the demons” (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15) and “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and in Paul as “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). Observe five things:

- Here Satan is described as the “prince of the authority (*exousia*) of the air. The word translated “power” or “authority” denotes the realm or sphere or empire of the devil’s influence (i.e., demonic hosts; see Col. 1:13). The word “air” could refer to (1) the literal atmosphere around us (hence the abode of demonic spirits); (2) or it could be synonymous with “darkness” (cf. Lk. 22:53; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13); or (3) it could be a reference to the nature of the demonic hosts; i.e., they are unearthly, spiritual, not human. (4) Or it could involve to some degree all these ideas and be “another way of indicating the ‘heavenly realm’, which, according to Ephesians 6:12, is the abode of those principalities and powers, the ‘world-rulers of this darkness’ and ‘spiritual forces of wickedness’, against which the people of Christ wage war” (O’Brien, 160).
- There are several different ways of translating this next phrase, but I think the best options is this: “the prince of the power of the air, [the prince of] the spirit which is now working . . .” That is to say, Satan is the ruling lord or prince over that evil principle (i.e., spirit, mood, temper, disposition) which operates in the lost (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12 and “spirit of the world”).
- Paul says Satan is “working” (*energeō*) in the “sons of disobedience” (cf. Mark. 3:17; Luke. 10:6; 16:8; 20:34; Acts 4:36; Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:14), a word used earlier of God’s activity in the world (1:11) in general and in the resurrection of Jesus in particular (1:20). Here it refers to Satan’s supernatural activity by which he exerts a negative influence over the lives of unbelievers. Note: this does *not* mean that all unbelievers are demonized. It does mean that “the whole world lies *in the power of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19).
- Paul clearly says that Satan is working “*now*” in unbelievers, those whom Paul describes as “the sons of disobedience.” In other words, although the readers of this epistle and other Christians were in bondage to Satan in the *past*, this does not mean Satan’s power ceased to exist. It is yet at work in the present in and among all who remain in unbelief. I hardly need to describe the countless ways that we see in our world today where Satan’s activity is evident.

- The Greek preposition translated “according to” (*kata*) must mean something more than simply that the lost live “in conformity with” or “after the manner of” the devil, as if Paul were saying unbelievers live like the devil lives. The idea is that in some way they have come under the controlling influence of Satan. Paul speaks in Romans 8:4 about believers walking “according to” (*kata*) the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 10:2) rather than “according to the flesh”, again with the idea of controlling influence.

(4) *We lived in bondage to fleshly lusts – 2:3a*

We indulged the “passions” (lit., “lusts”) of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:16,24). The word “flesh” does not refer to our physical bodies (skin and bones) but to the whole of our fallen, self-centered and corrupt nature. Hence “passions of the flesh” should not be restricted to sexual or sensual sins. Desires, in and of themselves, are not evil, but become such when they seek satisfaction in ways prohibited by God (e.g., hunger and sex are God-given desires but can become perverted when they turn to gluttony and lust). This self-indulgent lifestyle consisted of two things: (1) “carrying out [or, “doing”] the desires of the flesh”, and (2) “carrying out the desires of the mind (lit., thoughts).” In the latter he has in view intellectual pride, arrogance, ungodly ambition, malicious and bitter thoughts and intents, etc.

Note also the familiar evil triad of **world** (v. 2), **flesh** (v. 3), and **devil** (v. 2). See James 3:15; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:7-10. Says Stott,

“so then, before Jesus Christ set us free, we were subject to oppressive influences from both within and without. Outside was ‘the world’ (the prevailing secular culture); inside was ‘the flesh’ (our fallen nature twisted with self-centeredness); and beyond both, actively working through both, was that evil spirit, the devil, ‘the ruler of the kingdom of darkness’, who held us in captivity” (75).

Clinton Arnold concurs:

“Paul’s teaching suggests that the explanation for our behavior is not to be found exclusively in human nature or in terms of the world’s influence. Similarly, an exclusively demonic explanation for deviant behavior is unduly myopic. Rather, we should explain behavior on the basis of human nature, environment and the demonic – all three simultaneously. One part may play a leading role, but all three parts need to be considered” (*Powers*, 125-26).

(5) *Prior to our conversion we were all by nature the objects of divine wrath – 2:3b*

What is divine “wrath”? (Cf. Nahum 1:2-3a,6-8). The doctrine or concept of *wrath* is thought by many to be beneath God. C. H. Dodd, for example, a prominent NT scholar from Wales who died in 1973, spoke for many when said that the notion of divine wrath is *archaic* and that Paul’s terminology refers to no more than “an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe.” In other words, for people such as Dodd, divine wrath is an impersonal force operative in a moral universe, not a personal attribute or disposition in the character of God.

Divine wrath is not the loss of self-control or the irrational and capricious outburst of anger. It should never be thought of as a celestial bad temper or God lashing out at those who “rub him the wrong way.” ***Divine wrath is righteous antagonism toward all that is unholy. It is the revulsion of God’s character to that which is a violation of God’s will.*** Indeed, one may speak of ***divine wrath*** as a function of ***divine love***! For God’s wrath is his love for holiness and truth and justice. It is because God passionately loves purity and peace and perfection that he reacts angrily toward anything and anyone who defiles them.

Paul says that we were “by nature children of” wrath. What does he mean by the word “nature”? The word *phusis* refers to what is essential as opposed to what is incidental or accidental; what is innate as opposed to what is acquired, made, or taught. There are two ways it has been interpreted.

- First, “by nature” = in ourselves, as apart from divine grace; i.e., in our natural condition as lost.
- Second, “by nature” = by birth (see esp. Gal. 2:15). If the latter, Paul is describing our liability to wrath prior to acts of personal sin. Snodgrass defines it as “what one is by constitution rather than from experience or circumstance” (99). Observe Eadie’s eloquent explanation:

“And so ‘we are children of wrath,’ not accidentally, not by a fortuitous combination of circumstances, not even by individual sin and actual transgression, but ‘by nature’ – by an exposure which preceded personal

disobedience, and was not first created by it; an exposure which is inherent, hereditary, and common to all the race by the very condition of its present existence, for they are 'so born' children of wrath. For *phusis* does not refer to developed character, but to its hidden and instinctive sources. We are therefore . . . organically children of wrath; not each simply by personal guilt, but the entire race as a whole; not on account of nature, but by nature" (135-36).

This is the biblical doctrine of *original sin*, according to which we are born in a corrupt and therefore condemnable condition. (see Rom. 5:12ff.; cf. Psalm 51:5).

Note also the contrast between what we "were", and that "by nature", namely, objects of wrath, and what we "are", and that "by grace", namely, the children of God!

Our condition after conversion: alive in Christ – 2:4-10

Paul's portrayal of our salvation can be broken down in terms of three questions: what (vv. 4-6), why (v. 7), and how (vv. 8-10). And don't ever rush past those two stunning words, the only words that give us any hope of being set free from the condition that Paul has just described in vv. 1-3. "But God!"

(1) First, what? or the nature of our salvation in Christ – 2:4-6

Stott is among a few commentators who believe that the three verbs "made alive", "raised", and "seated" refer to three successive historical events in the experience of Jesus: resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God. But "what excites our amazement, . . . is that now **Paul is not writing about Christ but about us** [emphasis mine]. He is affirming not that God quickened, raised and seated Christ, but that he quickened, raised and seated **us** with Christ" (81).

Note these three verbs, each of which is combined with the preposition "with" to emphasize our union or solidarity with Jesus.

- **"He made us alive together with Christ"** (v. 5). "Dead people," says Best, "cannot bring themselves back to life . . . and so the first step here, and the following two, come from God. We can arrange neither to be born nor to be reborn" (215). The "life" we now live is a sharing in the "life" which Jesus received when God raised him from the dead. See Col. 2:12; 3:1. Paul then states four reasons for this experience as well as one factor that played no part.

(1) It was because God is "rich in mercy" (v. 4a). This is simply another way of saying it was not God's "duty" to save us. Mercy is more than pity. It is heartfelt compassion that leads to concrete saving action. If you could reduce God's mercy to dollars, there would be no end to counting the number of zeros. God's mercy is richer than all the gold in Ft. Knox. I read just the other day that Larry Ellison, founder of Oracle, is worth \$386 billion. And yet his wealth compares to God's like a grain of sand to the Mohave Desert. God's mercy is infinitely and immeasurably more than the combined wealth of Elon Musk, Larry Ellison, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and all the remaining billionaires together.

(2) It was because of his "great love with which he loved us" (v. 4b). It is "great" because of the character of its objects. Any love that could embrace people who are what vv. 1-3 says they are must be great! God's love for you and me isn't puppy love or a transient affection on which you cannot rely. It is truly GREAT in every sense of the term.

(3) It was in spite of the fact that we "were dead in our transgressions" (v. 5a). Our wickedness, our spiritual lifelessness, our enmity against God, were no barrier to the eternal purposes of his love!

(4) It was "by grace" that we have been saved (v. 5b). The word translated "saved" here and in v. 8 is an inclusive term that embraces God's acts of making us alive, raising us up, and seating us with Christ.

In summary, Paul could not have been clearer concerning the origins or the source of God's saving activity in Jesus: it was not in us but in him and his inexplicable love!

We need to pause for a moment to reflect more deeply on the *reason, ground, or cause* why God loved us so as to send his Son to die for us. Paul is inescapably clear in Eph. 2:4-6 and elsewhere that God loved us **in spite of** our

unloveliness, **not because** of our loveliness. Nothing in us stirred God's heart to send his Son. He sent his Son solely because of his character as a loving God. When God contemplated the objects of his redemptive love he saw only sin, rebellion, enmity, resistance. This is what magnifies the love of God in Christ is that "it was while we were yet sinners" that "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). It was as "helpless" and "ungodly" people (Rom. 5:6), not treasures, that God saw us. The only thing we stirred in God's heart was wrath. The only thing we could have moved or induced or inclined God to do was to judge us eternally. The fact that he gave his Son in love was not because of anything in us that he regarded as worthy of his affection but solely because of his great and unfathomable determination to love those who were the moral antithesis of himself and enemies of everything that he regards as holy and true and right.

We turn now to the second and third verbs that Paul uses to describe what God has done for us.

- *"He **raised** us up **with him**" (v. 6a).*
- *"He **seated** us **with him** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (v. 6b).*

Anyone who has done any counseling or ministry to those who have been abused or suffer with depression or live every day shackled by shame will tell you that the most fundamental issue is one of identity. They don't know who they are in Christ, nor do they know what God has done for them. Stop and ponder this breathtaking reality: if you have trusted in Jesus, God sees you as having been exalted up with Christ and seated in the heavens with Jesus. This is who you are!

Stop thinking of yourself as a loser, as a failure, as a castoff from the rest of the world. Let the Holy Spirit awaken you to this incredible truth. Let me state it again: ***You have been raised, exalted, and seated in the heavens together with Jesus.*** I know that this runs counter to your experience day in and day out. We still live in our mortal bodies and still struggle with the sinful impulses of the flesh. People slander you. They use you. They exploit you. They sin against you. They abuse you. And the only way we can survive and live above the damage they inflict is by constantly reminding ourselves and reflecting on the reality of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

In one sense, we are all present in this auditorium. We walk on the earth. We breathe its air. We bask under the sun above. But in a yet far more important sense, we are now and forever will be seated together with Jesus Christ in the heavens. That's not science fiction or fantasy or a good story designed to make you feel better. It is quite literally true.

Here I need to reiterate what I said in our study of Eph. 1:15-23. We must not stop with the truth that God has exalted Jesus and put in subjection to him all demonic spirits, including Satan. Look with me at Ephesians 2:4-6 –

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and **raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**"*

Don't ever cower in fear or allow yourself to be intimidated by demons. They have been subjected to the authority of the risen Christ. But more than that, they have also been subjected to you! God reckons you to be one with Jesus, such that if demons are under his authority they are also under ours. See Luke 10:17-20. If demons are under the feet of the risen Christ, they also are under our feet! It reminds me of something I read in one of Neil Anderson's books: ***"Spiritual warfare is not a horizontal tug of war. It is a vertical chain of command!"***

[*"The Colorado Celebration of Horror!"*]

(2) *Second, **why?** or the purpose of our salvation in Christ – 2:7*

Making us alive in Christ and setting us free from the guilt and bondage of spiritual death was only the *penultimate* purpose of God. The *ultimate* motivation in God's heart for saving lost souls was so that they might become, throughout all eternity, trophies on display for all to see the magnificence and the surpassing riches of God's grace in kindness in Christ! The plural "coming ages" suggests one age following inexorably upon another, like the successive waves of the sea incessantly crashing in on the shore. Throughout all time and into eternity, God will hold us up as trophies of his saving grace. He will say to the angels in heaven and the demons in hell: "Look at what my immeasurable, unfathomable, limitless grace has done! Look at what kindness I have shown to people who deserved only wrath and judgment."

(3) *Third, **how?** or the basis of our salvation in Christ – 2:8-10*

Here Paul says five things:

- It is "by grace" (v. 8a).
- It is "through faith" (v. 8b).
- It is a divine "gift" (v. 8c).

What exactly is the "gift" (v. 8) of God? Clearly the "gift" is *salvation in its totality*, a salvation that flows out of God's grace and becomes ours through faith. From beginning to end, from its inception to its consummation, salvation is a gift of God to his elect. Consequently, that faith by which we come into experiential possession of what God in grace has provided is as much a gift as any and every other aspect of salvation. One can no more deny that faith is wrapped up in God's gift to us than he can deny it of God's grace. *All is of God!* Salvation is of the Lord!

- It is not of human works, thereby excluding boasting (v. 9).

Here "works" is not "works of the Mosaic Law" (as in Romans and Galatians) but human effort in general, any and all deeds generated by the human heart in an attempt to put God in our debt. As Stott says, "it is neither your achievement ('not your own doing') nor a reward for any of your deeds of religion or philanthropy ('not because of works'). Since, therefore, there is no room for human merit, there is no room for human boasting either" (83).

- The gracious foundation of our salvation is evident from three facts (v. 10).

(1) We are God's workmanship (2:10a). Self-creation is non-sensical. "You see then," says Calvin, "that this word 'create' is enough to stop the mouths and put away the cackling of such as boast of having any merit. For when they say so, they presuppose that they were their own creators" (162). Paul's point is that just as we contributed nothing to our initial physical creation, neither did we contribute anything to our spiritual re-creation. This concept of our being the "creation" of God is linked to the anticipation in the age to come of the creation of a "new heaven" and "new earth". Paul's point here, as in 2 Cor. 5:17, is that the "new creation" that is yet to come has *already* come in part, in God's work of salvation in us.

(2) Good works are the purpose, not the procuring cause, of salvation (2:10b; see esp. Titus 3:8). **Salvation is not *by* works but *for* works.** In order to procure salvation works would have to *precede* it, whereas Paul says that good works *follow* salvation as its pre-ordained fruit. Works are excluded as the antecedent cause of salvation (v. 9) but essential as the subsequent evidence of it (v. 10). To use the language of the Protestant Reformers: *sola fides iustificat, sed non fides quae est sola!* Or: faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone!

(3) The good works themselves were preordained by God (2:10c). Paul clearly states that it is not us but our "good works" which God prepared beforehand. The only other use of this verb is Rom. 9:23 which is an obvious predestinarian context. God's determination to bring us to glory entails the intermediate steps of conforming us through good works to the image of his Son. And it was not only our initial reception of salvation that God purposed in eternity past (1:4-5,10-11) but also our ethical activity: our deeds, our thoughts, our works.

Note that the paragraph ends (v. 10) where it began (v. 1), namely, with our "walk". But because of God's grace it is now in "good works" and no longer in "trespasses and sins"!

In conclusion, we were children of wrath, but God has graciously worked in Christ to transform us into the children of God. We were sons and daughters of disobedience, but God has graciously worked in Christ to give us new desires for holiness. We were enslaved to the ways of this world, but God has graciously worked in Christ to give us a heart and mind captivated and controlled by the ways of a heavenly kingdom. We were dead, lifeless, and hopeless in our sins, but God has graciously worked in Christ to cause us to be born again unto a new life in Jesus.