# By grace are ye saved through faith … lest any man should boast

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Ephesians 2

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**2**You were dead through the trespasses and sins **2**in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. **3**All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. **4**But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5**even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6**and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7**so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— **9**not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10**For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**11**So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— **12**remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14**For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. **15**He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, **16**and might reconcile both groups to God in one bodythrough the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.**17**So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; **18**for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, **20**built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. **21**In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; **22**in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

## Introduction

The structure of this chapter is pretty simple, really.

* You used to be bad, and hang out with other bad people.
* Something happened.
* And now you are something else.

## You used to be bad

Paul describes our condition clearly and with devastating honesty. He really hammers it home.

* We were trespassers and sinners.
* We went along with the bad crowd.
* There’s a bad spirit that leads the world, and we followed it.
* We followed whatever impulses our body gave us.
* We lived in anger, and deserved anger in return.
* We were strangers to God and God’s people.
* We were hostile to God and God’s people.
* In a word, we were: dead.

Does that mean we were as bad as we could possibly be? No. Of course not. But are we ever as good as we know we can be? No. Of course not. And the gulf between what we could be, what we should be was growing ever greater.

Now, Paul is writing specifically to the church at Ephesus, or perhaps to the churches in the area, as we discussed before. So, we are overhearing Paul address people who *used* to be bad, but are different now.

And let me just ask a question right now that we’ll get back to in a few minutes: They *used to*  be the bad people, but what are they now? Are they the good people?

Think about that. More to come on that.

## Something happened

But something happened.

They were *saved*. Oh, that *might* be the answer to the question: What are they now, after having been the bad people: they are the saved people. Let’s put a pin in that, too.

What happened, of course, was the death of Jesus on the cross, which was God’s inestimable kindness to us. As the scripture says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.“ One of the most famous verses in the Bible. I learned it, passively, some thirty or forty years ago in the English of King James’s time: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.“

Something happened, and they were not the bad people anymore. And it wasn’t that they decided not be bad people. It was a gift to us, from God.

Today is the celebration of Pentecost, and we are glad for the many gifts of the Spirit. But are supremely glad of this gift: we are saved. We didn’t do it; we are not self-made men and women, and if we attempted to brag that we did, we’d be just plain wrong. We are saved as a gift. We are saved through grace. It’s so important Paul says it twice.

## And now you are something else

Ok, let’s talk about what they are now. As I said, they used to be the bad people, but through the gracious gift of God, they aren’t.

What are they?

Are they the good people?

Well, I think it is very interesting that Paul never says that. It’s not moving from bad to good. We talked already that one way to view the change is from bad to saved. They are saved from their badness.

But I notice that Paul uses a lot of images and word pictures to describe their new status.

What comes to your mind when you hear these images?

* One with the Jews
* Those who have access to the Father in one Spirit
* Citizens
* Members of God’s family
* Part of God’s temple
* Part of the body

One with the Jews. Paul makes a big deal that Jews and Gentiles are now part of the same thing. It used to be you could tell the “good” people from the “bad” people by whether they were circumcised. But that’s no longer the case! Gentile males don’t need to be circumcised. And that’s implied good news for Jewish females and Gentile females alike: they don’t need that marker to be a first-class God-follower.

Those who have access to the Father in one Spirit. Now we’re talking. Being among the saved means we now can approach God directly in the Spirit. We are assured that God will listen when we talk (not that God will do what we want if we talk about is what we want, but God will listen).

Citizens. We are now citizens in the kingdom of heaven. Like being “one with the Jews,” this implies we are in a community of people. In this kingdom, of course, we obey God.

Members of God’s family, God’s household. Again, we are connected to one another, this time in the intimacy of family.

Part of God’s temple. We again are in a community. But we are built together to worship and praise God. The foundation is Jesus Christ, and (secondarily) Christ’s apostles and teachers (who wrote this book!)

Part of the body. We are one body now – and it can’t get more intimate than that. We are organically connected to God.

## Conclusion

Our transition isn’t from being bad to instantly good. We are supposed to be becoming holy and God’s image bearers, but that’s a “not yet” thing. Our alienation from God is over, and we are not strangers, but God’s friends.

How will this affect your life this week?