

Introduction

How can it be? Most of us are what the Apostle Paul called **"saved."** But how can it be that we are? Charles Wesley asked just that question in the acclaimed hymn of his that we sang earlier. Turn to Ephesians 2:1-10 and let's answer it.

The Condition of the Unserved

Paul begins in verse 1 by revealing the condition of all unsaved people. They're **"dead"** in their **"trespasses and sins."** Trespasses and sins are the same thing and we need to define precisely what they are.

Suppose you hand me \$100 and ask me to give it anonymously to so and so. But I only give so and so \$50 and keep the rest for me. Let me ask you. Who does my action affect and how does it affect them? It affects the giver of the money by thwarting his intention, the recipient by decreasing what he or she received, and me by diminishing my character.

But here's what I want you to see. My action isn't a sin because it adversely affects those people. People aren't the reference point of sin.

Psalms 51:4 reveals who is. After committing adultery and murder, David declared, **"Against You (God), You only, I have sinned."** That isn't the outrageous statement some think it is. It just reflects the truth. People aren't the reference point of sin. God and God alone is. What we think, feel, or do is a sin when it adversely affects Him.

The Bible uses two words to describe how it does, disgust and grief. When a thought, feeling, or action of ours disgusts or grieves Him, it's a sin apart from any effects it has on people. So, God is disgusted when I keep the \$50 I'm supposed to give. That and that alone makes it a sin.

Now, verse 1 identifies what the consequence of sins is to unsaved people. They're **"dead."** That means they're incapable of acting on and responding to Jesus and the realities of His kingdom at hand. I've conducted many memorial services with open caskets and have witnessed this. People hug the corpse, but it doesn't hug them back. Or beautiful

music is played but the corpse doesn't enjoy it. Or tribute is paid to the corpse but it doesn't understand it. The corpse is dead to the material world. It's incapable of acting on and responding to it. In the same way, unsaved people are dead to the spiritual world of Jesus and His kingdom at hand. They're incapable of acting on and responding to it.

And what a tragedy that is. My prayers, because I'm saved, prevail upon God. The prayers of the unsaved don't. I hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. The unsaved don't. I know the fullness of Jesus' joy. The unsaved don't. I have a profound and comforting sense of God's presence always with me. The unsaved don't. That, according to verse 1, is the condition of unsaved people. They're dead in their sins.

The Unsaved and Satan

But they don't recognize that they are. We see that in verse 2. Paul mentions two realities here. One is "**the prince of the power of the air,**" which refers to Satan. The other is "**this world,**" which refers to culture set against God. Notice what Paul teaches about them. They direct the persons and lives of all unsaved people.

They do so in various ways, the chief of which he reveals in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "**the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving.**" The ancient Greeks had a saying, "**Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.**" That's a penetrating insight, and it's exactly what Satan and secular culture do. They make the unsaved "**mad**" (insane, out of touch with reality), in a particular sense.

Dallas Willard explains that madness this way. The natural role of the human mind is to find the right way to act. It's to discover the way that is just and true and that leads to what is good. But Satan, in conjunction with secular culture, is able to "**work in**" the unsaved, in their minds, to disorient them. Their minds then turn from reason to rationalization, to justifying what they do. Their minds no longer establish what is the right way to act. They turn instead to establishing that whatever the unsaved do is just, true, and good, or at least is

necessary – no matter how evil it is. That is madness. In that specific sense, every unsaved person is insane, out or touch with reality.

Studies show, for instance, that 74% of high school students cheat in their classes. And almost all of them justify doing so. One self-confident young man put it this way: **“Everyone else is cheating and so, to be competitive, I have to cheat too. But I learn what I need to know. So, what’s the big deal?”** Satan and his cultural context have made that young man mad. His mind establishes the evil he does as necessary and even just. He is, in that sense, insane.

The Unsaved and the Flesh

Unfortunately, Satan and secular culture aren’t the only problems the unsaved have. There’s another in verse 3. It’s **“the lusts of the flesh.”** The word **“lusts”** refers to desires formed for evil and against God. The word **“flesh”** refers to the human body. We see here that desires and the human body are linked. First, the desires reside in the body, in its parts. And second, the desires are expressed or acted out by the body. The result is that the desires and bodies of the unsaved, together, constitute a pervasive structure of evil. The unsaved are poised to sin, in other words, only awaiting the occasion.

The unsaved are poised to sin, for instance, when they’re cheated. I was in an automobile repair shop when a man got mad for being overcharged. That’s what he thought at least. So, he began speaking disparagingly to the clerk who took his money. He told her that that they were all crooks, including her.

That fleshes out verse 3. What compels the unsaved to commit the majority of sins they commit? It’s the lusts of the flesh – the desires formed for evil and against God that reside in their body parts. They’re poised to sin, only awaiting the occasion.

Verse 3 reveals the consequence of that. The unsaved are **“children of wrath.”** At the Second Coming of Jesus, God’s wrath will come against them. He will judge and punish them for their sins.

The Condition of the Saved

But there's good news when we convert to Jesus. God makes us **"alive,"** verse 5, or as verse 6 says it metaphorically, He **"raises us up"** with Jesus **"in the heavenly places."** That means that the Holy Spirit makes us spiritually alive. He infuses a new heavenly or supernatural power and life in us that create two remarkable changes. First, we desire to act on and respond to Jesus and His kingdom at hand. And second, we're capable of doing just that. We call that **"regeneration."**

Sadly, most American churches preach and teach very little about regeneration. They identify conversion to Jesus almost exclusively with forgiveness of sins. They talk all the time about the converted being forgiven of their sins but almost never about them being regenerated.

But regeneration is just as central to conversion as forgiveness is. Forgiveness in fact is subordinate to it. The Holy Spirit gives us the new power and life and in light of that, our sins are forgiven as well. At that point, regenerated and forgiven, we desire to engage Jesus and His kingdom at hand and do. That in turn gives us ever increasing power over the sources of sin: Satan, secular culture, and the lusts of our flesh.

A man I know regularly viewed pornography. But now, and I quote him: **"I won't even watch bra commercials. I turn away when they come on."** That's a profound psychological change. What explains it? Six months ago, he converted to Jesus and was regenerated.

But regeneration reaches beyond life now to its ultimate consequence in verse 7. It's the **"riches"** of Jesus in the life to come. It's a breathtaking life of unspeakable love, peace, and joy in a breathtaking environment and world - that never ends.

Through Faith

But how can it be? That's the question Wesley asked and that I ask you today. How can it be that we're **"saved,"** that is, regenerated, forgiven, and given eternal life? Paul tells us in verses 8-10.

First, we're saved **"through faith."** It's what we call **"saving**

faith,” which has two essential components.

One is a belief. That belief is the conviction that Jesus is a real and living person and that He is the greatest and best, utterly competent and good. We're convinced of that. And because we are, we're confident that it's safe and best to become and do all that He says.

The second component is a choice. That choice is to let Jesus **“Master”** us. We decide to make Him our primary teacher – to take our instruction and training from Him. We decide to learn from Him how to live our real lives, the ones we're actually living, in His kingdom at hand. We then arrange our affairs around carrying out that decision.

That choice and the belief that precedes it constitute saving faith.

I mentioned the regenerated man who now won't even watch bra commercials on TV. He is regenerated because of what he did six months ago. He came to believe that Jesus is the greatest and best and chose to let Him **“Master”** him. He's arranged his affairs around learning what Jesus says and trying and training to do it. That is saving faith.

By Grace

But while we call it **“saving”** faith, in reality, it doesn't save us. Grace does. Paul makes that clear in verse 8. We're saved **“by grace.”** You know what grace is. It's giving someone something good he or she doesn't deserve or not giving someone something bad he or she does deserve. In verse 8, it's God who does that. We're saved by His grace. Without His grace, our faith wouldn't save us.

I'd explain it this way. Consider two facts about those of us who have faith in Jesus as I defined it. One is that all of us have sinned. Because we have, God can justly damn us even though we having saving faith in Jesus. Another fact is that Jesus took all of our sins into Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for them that we should have paid. Because He did, God can justly save us. God has two options, in other words, and because He loves us, He chose the second. He chose not to give us the bad thing we do deserve, damnation, and to give us the good

thing we don't deserve, salvation. That's grace and we're saved **"by"** it.

For Good Work

We come now to the last verse of our text, which reveals what we're saved **"for,"** excuse my English. It's **"good works."** Our evangelical tradition of John Wesley called these good works **"testimony."** It rightly contended that if we're truly saved, regenerated and forgiven, our lives will tell it – through our good works. It identified four such works.

One is what Wesley called **"means of grace."** These are spiritual practices that sustain and develop the new power and life that are in us. They include solitude and silence, fasting, study, prayer, worship, fellowship, purposeful obedience, thanksgiving, and the practice of the presence of God, to name a few.

A second good work is the giving of money and goods to build God's kingdom on earth and to meet needs. Wesley formed small groups and required everyone in them to give something, no matter how little. He knew that giving what we can materially is a testimony of salvation.

Witness is a third good work. We present the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom at hand through private and public efforts. We tell the unsaved about their condition before God, His provision for them through Jesus, and how they can take that provision of His.

And finally, a fourth good work is standing for truth. We defend and promote what is just, right, and good in society and in our own lives. Overcoming evil with good is a primary component of this good work.

Those then are our good works and as Paul tells us in verse 9, they don't save us. But they testify that we're saved. They're an integral part of our conversion to Jesus.

Conclusion

We're done with verses 1-10 and now know the answer to Charles Wesley's question, **"How can it be that we're saved?"** God's crystal clear answer is, ***"By grace through faith for good works."***