



Four Reformation Gems, Part 2 Ephesians 2:1-10

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In order to understand the history out of which the Protestant Reformation was born, in Part 1 of this article we looked at some of the practical issues, doctrinal confusion, and heretical practices which were rampant in the early 16th century.¹ These concerns were merely the symptoms of the deep theological heresies that had crept into the church and had become enshrined as dogma. The Protestant Reformation was at its heart a *theological controversy*. Now, in this second and final article, we are taking a look at some of the doctrines which were at the center of the Reformation.²

Our text will be **Ephesians 2:1-10**. Out of all the truths which were rediscovered and crystallized during the Reformation, we will focus on four. We find four basic doctrines penned by Paul some 1500 years before Martin Luther ever rose to defend them. I view them as four gems which laid buried beneath the corrupt sands of papal traditions and superstitions for nearly 10 centuries.

Gem #1: The Biblical View of Man (vv. 2:1-3)

Ephesians 2:1-3, And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by

- 1 You can access the previous article and all other articles archived on our website at www.kootenaichurch.org.
- 2 The four doctrines I have chosen come out of Ephesians 2. They do not constitute the totality of theological issues which divide Catholics and Protestants. Much more could be written about penal substitution, transubstantiation, Purgatory, and of course, the lynch pin of the Reformation: justification by faith.

nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

The picture is not a flattering one. Without Christ, man is dead in his trespasses and sins. Although we live physically, and move and operate and look very much alive, our spiritual condition could not be worse. Spiritually, we are born dead. We are DOA at the moment of birth, spiritually speaking.

Man is not sick in sin--still able to do a few things, but lacking a little strength and just needing a little help. He is dead.

Man is not terminally ill in sin--eventually going to die from it and just needing to avail himself of the right cure or treatment. He is dead.

The Bible teaches that every faculty of man is infected and affected by sin. The effects of sin on Adam's race is total. There is not one man born who is not totally devastated by the effects of Adam's fall, save only Christ, and that because he was born of a virgin and not conceived by a sinful man. When Adam fell, he broke the neck of his entire race and rendered us helpless and hopeless and totally unable to effect our own salvation.

Sin's hold on mankind is total and complete. There is no element of fallen man that is free from the effects of sin. Our bodies are dying even as you read this. From the moment of our conception, we begin to die. At the moment life begins, we are on a irreversible collision course with death.

Sin has impaired man's ability to reason, to think, to learn, to discern. He is darkened in his understanding (**Eph. 4:17-19**). The mind of fallen man is hostile to God and cannot and will not be subject itself to the law of God (**Rom. 8:6-8**) and cannot assess spiritual truths and realities (**1 Corinthians 2:10-16**).

Sin has devastated all man's relationships so that self is enthroned and there is no way he will abdicate his reign.

Man's passions, thinking, goals, emotions, reason, intellect, and, yes, even his will are ravaged by sin and bear the irreparable marks of the fall. Let us not for one moment fall into the delusion of thinking that Adam's sin affected every part of the created universe and every element of man's constitution except his "glorious will," which exists in some pristine state of innocence that it enjoyed in the garden of Eden before the fall. Forget it. You're dead.

Scripture says we are all under sin (**Romans 3:9-18**). Scripture says that without Christ we are children of wrath, slaves to sin (**Romans 6:1-23**), unable to please God or perform any act of righteousness. We are conceived in sin, born in iniquity, at enmity with God (**Romans 8:7-8**) and born condemned (**John 3:18-21**). We are unable to do anything to contribute to, add to, effect, or initiate salvation. Man is dead.

Roman Catholicism says, "No. Man is not dead in sin. Man is a sinner, yes, but we still have the capacity to please God and to cooperate with God in salvation. Man is able, by the act of his own will or the works of his own righteousness, to earn God's favor and grace." The heart of Roman Catholicism was, and still is, a belief in "works righteousness."

It is a works-based salvation which is the outflow of Rome's denial that man is dead in his sin. The difference between a Protestant and a Catholic rests in the answer to this fundamental question: "What is the condition of a lost man?" Is he dead in sin, or just slightly ill? Is he incapable or able to save himself by his works? Is he able to cooperate with God in salvation and make a contribution, or is he entirely dependent upon another for his salvation?

Dead people don't work. Dead people don't believe. Dead people don't "decide for Christ." Dead people don't make themselves alive. That is the work of God.

Back to **Ephesians 2**. As if being dead in sin is not enough, Paul tells us that we were slaves. Without Christ we lived in a state of perpetual domination. We were dominated, ruled, governed, by three things.

First, "**according to the course of this world**" (v. 2). The world's system, the world's thinking, the world's ways directed and dominated us before our salvation. We were slaves to the world. Our thinking, conduct, and actions were driven by the world system. John tells us in 1 John 5 that the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

Second, "**according to the prince of the power of the air**" (v. 2). This is Satan. Unredeemed man is a slave to the devil. He does his bidding, jumps at his promptings, and finds himself allied and in allegiance to Satan against God. Unredeemed man hates Christ and is in a state of constant

rebellion to God, from whom he cannot in his own strength turn away. Satan is his tour guide. Unknowingly, unwittingly, but willfully, sinful man follows his rebellious master.

Third, "**according to the lusts of the flesh**" (v. 3). This is unredeemed, sinful, fallen nature. Our passions, drives, desires, were all characterized by sin, in bondage to sin, and driving us onward into sin. Adam's race willfully plunges itself into its depravity, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and without Christ we are, by nature, children of wrath. We did what our passions, desires, and drives dictated and we had no ability to deny them, correct them, tame them, or subjugate them. We certainly had no ability to set ourselves at liberty from them. The flesh is always in rebellion against God and must be mortified. It cannot be redeemed. It cannot be corrected. It cannot be taught to obey God.

This is what it means to be "dead in trespasses and sins." We were chained to sin, enslaved to it, dominated by it, hopeless, lost, shipwrecked, destitute, and ruined. Unable to change our situation, we were slaves to the world, the flesh and the devil. We needed to be set free.

On the contrary, Rome said, "Man isn't that bad. He is able to believe, able to improve his spiritual situation, able to free himself from the world, the flesh and the devil. He is capable of exercising his will and cooperating with God in his redemption. All man needs is enough grace to make him able, and he can use that grace to do the works which will merit eternal life." Works righteousness.

Luther had a debate with a Catholic theologian named Erasmus. In that debate, Luther identified this as the issue of the Reformation. He called it the hinge on which the door of the Reformation swung. The question at the heart of the Reformation was not indulgences. It was not penance. It was not purgatory. It was not communion. Those were corruptions of theology, and serious ones at that, which sprang from the false doctrine of Rome concerning the condition of fallen man. This core theological question is what separated Catholics from Protestants: "What is the condition of fallen man?" Is he able, capable, willing to effect his own salvation? Or is he unable, incapable, and unwilling to effect his own salvation, and therefore desperately in need of the grace of God? That was the heart issue, and still is.

The Reformation said, "No. Scripture says that man is dead in sin and unable to save himself." The Reformation restored a biblical view of man.

Gem #2: The Biblical View of God (Eph. 2:4-7)
Ephesians 2:4-7, But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even

when we were dead in our transgressions, 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, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Once we rightly understand man's condition, we can quickly see that the Roman Catholic solution is insufficient to solve man's sin problem. What is necessary to remedy man's deadness? The only sufficient remedy is a sovereign and powerful God who, for His glory and for His sake, by His choice, gives life to the spiritually dead sinner.

That remedy is precisely what God has provided, according to our text. God is rich in mercy and loved us with a great love. Even when we were dead, He made us alive, together with Christ. Paul repeats the seriousness of our condition: "Even when we were dead."

Paul's point in Ephesians 2 is the very truth that the Reformation brought back into focus and to the forefront of the discussion: that salvation is the work of God and not of man. It is by grace. It must be by grace, because dead people do not work.

The imagery of the passage is unmistakable. It is the image of death and resurrection. You were dead. Now you have been made alive. Dead people don't raise themselves to life. It is God who gives physical life to a corpse. It is God who gives spiritual life to a spiritually dead sinner. It is God who has raised us up.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation makes salvation a work of man. It is man who improves upon himself with the "grace" that God supplies. It is man who does works of penance, serves time in purgatory, does good deeds, exercises faith, and otherwise earns God's favor and a right standing before Him. In the Roman Catholic system, it is all about man: a man-centered, man-glorifying doctrine and system by which the diadem of honor and glory is stripped from the crown of Christ and placed upon the head of fallen man, who has largely -- if not solely -- himself to thank for his salvation.

Luther, Calvin, Knox and others appealed to the Scriptures which say that it is God Who is rich in mercy, Who raises the spiritually dead sinner, Who seats us with Christ in the Heavenly places, Who in the ages to come will show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2 does not introduce any new material. Paul stated back in Chapter 1 that it is God who chooses us in Christ before the world began, predestines us to adoption as sons, freely bestows grace on us in the beloved, lavishes

richly on us wisdom and insight, predestines us to our inheritance according to the council of His will, and seals us with the Holy Spirit when we believe (**Eph. 1:1-14**).

The Bible teaches, and the Reformation maintained, that salvation is not the work of man, but of God. It is not according to the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy (**Romans 9:16**). The diadem of honor and glory is left for the crown of Christ and placed on His head as the rightful recipient of all honor and glory and dominion forever and ever, world without end, for He is the sovereign God who has redeemed us by His blood and raised us from spiritual deadness.

Gem #3: The Biblical View of Salvation (Eph. 2:8-9)

Ephesians 2:8-9, For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This logically follows what we have already considered. Salvation is by grace through faith. So simple. No indulgences, no penance, no works, no striving. There is no worrying about whether or not we have done enough, no fretting with uncertainty as to our justification with God. No. Salvation is by grace, through faith and not of works.

How is a man made right (just) before God? How can I -- a guilty, unholy, unrighteous sinner, whose conscience bears witness to my guilt -- be accepted by a holy, righteous God? It is by grace, through faith.

Romans 1:17 says that the righteousness of God comes by faith. The righteous man shall live by his faith. Scripture states it over and over so clearly. **Philippians 3:9** says that there is a righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. **Titus 3:5** says, "**He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. Romans 3:28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 2 Timothy 1:9, "God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."**

Notice in verse 8 of Ephesians 2 that the "faith" is not of yourselves. The faith is a gift of God. Faith, belief, is not a work. How can it not be a work? Because it is a gift from God. Why? So that no man can boast. No man can say, "I believed. I was smart enough, good enough, wise enough to put my faith in Christ. What separates me from the next guy who perishes in eternal flames? I had faith."

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to

suffer for His sake.” It has been granted to you to believe. You can’t take credit for belief. Dead people don’t believe. Belief and faith are not things you muster, or create, or do to earn salvation. They are gifts of grace from God.

In the biblical understanding of salvation, the only thing that makes me different from the sinner who dies in his sins without Christ and perishes, is the sovereign, matchless, merciful grace of God which has saved this wretched sinner, who deserved the most intense fire of eternal hell. Grace, grace, God’s grace!

In the Roman Catholic system, what makes me different from the one who perishes is not the grace and mercy of God, but myself. I improved on the grace given to me. I bettered myself. I had the power, the capacity, the ability, the wisdom, the knowledge, the sense to rightly evaluate the claims of Christ and to make that smart and sensible decision to trust Christ. I was smart enough to see the truth, believe the truth, discern the truth, and then, by the exercise of my will, I chose Him. I improve upon the grace I am given, and by good works, I merit eternal life. That is the salvation offered by Rome.

Forget it! We will not spend eternity in Heaven patting ourselves and each other on the back. “Whew. Glad you made it. Boy, you were pretty smart to believe in Christ. Good thing you did that. Kudos to you.” We will spend eternity in Heaven singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing; for You purchased for God with your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

Gem #4: The Biblical View of Works (Eph. 2:10)

Ephesians 2:10, For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

If man is dead and cannot work for salvation, if it is God who saves us apart from works, then where do works fit in? They fit in **after** salvation. Works come after. They don’t earn salvation; they evidence salvation. Good deeds are the evidence of salvation not the means, basis, or a help to salvation.

The natural longing of the redeemed heart is to worship, serve, and honor the Redeemer. Church attendance, ancestry, service, giving, baptism, communion, or any other work or activity cannot and will not contribute to your salvation whatsoever.

Rome had it wrong. People were taught to place their faith in their penance, their pilgrimages, their worship of saints, objects, relics, their veneration of holy sacraments,

the mass, the priest, confession, indulgences, the pope, cardinals, bishops, and the church. It led people down the primrose path to destruction. For the one saving object of faith, Jesus Christ, was concealed from the people. They were told to trust in themselves.

The reformers had it right. All our works are as filthy rags. Salvation is apart from works, but salvation results in works.

Someone may object, “Well then, at least I can boast about my works. I have something to take credit for, my service after salvation.”

Verse 10 says these were prepared by God beforehand so that you would walk in them. All your good deeds were prepared by Him beforehand. You can’t boast about anything! You can’t take credit for earning salvation, you can’t take credit for believing, and you can’t take credit for the works that have accompanied your salvation as the evidence of it. Those were all God’s doing!

That won’t come as good news to some glory hogs who desperately search about for something in their redemption for which they can take credit. “Surely, I had *something* to do with it!”

“I earned it.” No. Can’t be earned. It is by grace.

“I believed.” No. That was granted to you, not of yourselves.

“I did deeds for the Lord afterward.” No. Those were prepared for you to walk in.

You still think you had something to do with it? Read the passage and answer me this: “What can a dead person do to effect their own resurrection? How can he then boast?”

Romans 3:27, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded.” It is shut out.

We were dead. He is rich in mercy and raised us up. It was done by grace through a faith that is not my own, does not originate with me, so that I cannot boast. Even my good works which accompany my salvation are His works prepared for me to walk in.

What is the End of the Matter?

What should this do for us? First, it should make us **humble**. We are nothing. We have nothing to offer. He looked down, chose, loved, and saved us. That just destroys human pride, which is so abhorrent in the sight of God. How can we be anything but humbled?

Second, we should be **thankful**. Thankful that God is rich in grace. Thankful that for some reason, known only to Him, He chose us, called us, died for us, and redeemed us by His blood. Thankful that it is by grace and not by works. Thankful for the assurance that comes with having our sins forgiven and being declared righteous in the sight of God.

Thankful for the grace that calls and changes a heart and sets us free from sin, Satan and the world. I'm thankful.

Some who are reading this may not be in the family of God yet. Some of you may be yet trusting in anything and everything other than Christ for salvation. You have to answer the question, "How can a man be right before God?" Before Luther came to faith in Christ, this was the question that haunted him. How can I know that my sins are forgiven and that I will be welcomed into God's Heaven?

Luther took his question to a friend who advised him to pursue righteousness through confession. "Luther, you must confess your sins to a priest. Confess them all and find forgiveness in the pronouncement of the priest and the pope."

Luther, an Augustinian monk, went to his priest. He confessed. . . and he confessed. Luther would spend hours in the confessional confessing his every sin. He would examine his motives, he would wrack his brain, drudging up and confessing every idle thought, every foolish notion, every idle word, every sin. Nothing was too menial. He exasperated the priests, who would dread to hear Luther's voice in the confessional and dread to see him come for confession.

Luther found no rest. How could He be certain that he confessed all his sins? What if he forgot one? His times of confession simply served to accentuate his guilt and show him just how unholy, unrighteous and desperate he was.

A second friend counseled him, "Luther, Jesus said you must deny yourself and follow him. The path to righteousness is in self-denial." In order to earn his righteousness with God, Luther began to inflict upon himself suffering. He would deny himself food and water for days on end. He would sleep in a cold room without blankets and clothing hoping that in denying himself these things, he could earn right-standing before God. Yet his conscience was wracked with guilt.

A third friend counseled Luther to make a trip to Rome, the Holy City, where he was sure to find answers and forgiveness for his sins. Luther left for Rome in search of forgiveness and cleansing.

As he approached the city, Luther said, "Oh, Holy City of Rome, thrice Holy art Thou for the blood of martyrs shed in Thee." While in Rome, Luther did not find answers. His conscience continued to haunt him. He saw in Rome a luxurious papacy surrounded by the poor. He saw corruption, power, immorality among the priests. He saw the veneration of relics as people would bow in worship before a piece of wood they were told came from the cross, or before a bone from the finger of the Apostle John. They kissed

statues and robes, and worshiped objects, crucifixes and relics. Luther's opinion of Rome changed.

He said upon entering Rome, "Oh, Holy City of Rome, thrice Holy art Thou for the blood of martyrs shed in Thee." Upon leaving Rome Luther said, "If there is a hell, Rome is built over it."

Confession, affliction, and pilgrimage, and yet Martin Luther had no peace with God. Not until studying Romans 1 did Luther realize that the righteousness that we need to stand in the presence of God is not a righteousness which we have, but it is one which God gives freely to those who place their trust in Christ for salvation.

What are you trusting in? Are you leaning on the props of your own self righteousness? Are you trusting in your abilities, your deeds, your baptism, your church attendance, or some feeling? Or have you cast your faith, your hope and your belief on the Lord Jesus Christ, the spotless, sinless Son of God who loved you and gave His life for you?

To God be the Glory! Alone!

Without Wax -

