**WORSHIP**

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**

OLD TESTAMENT

Numbers 21:4-9

*The Bronze Snake*

**4 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way;  5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” 6 Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.  7 The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.”  9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.**

**21:4** *the way to the Red Sea*. The Gulf of Aqaba is meant, on the east side of the Sinai Peninsula southeast of Canaan. This region (likely near Punon was well known for its copper mines. (Copper is used for making bronze.) (TLSB)

*impatient*. Caused by travel away from Canaan rather than toward it. (TLSB)

With Moses’ determination not to engage Edom in battle (see note on 20:20), the people became impatient with him and with the direction the Lord was taking them. Flushed with victory, they were confident in themselves. They forgot that their victory over Arad was granted by the Lord in response to their solemn pledge (v. 2); now they were ready to rebel again. (CSB)

Following the thirty days of mourning, Israel sets out from Hor to go around Edom (Num 20:20-25). Attention to these places indicates that Israel was going back to where they started from. They were walking in circles. On the road going nowhere, they begin to believe that the Lord’s delays are his denials. – Even this generation, which was removed forty years from the life of Egypt, repeated the complaints of the first generation. (PBC)

**21:5** WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT US UP OUT OF EGYPT – Egypt never looked so good as when the Israelites were in the desert. In the wilderness all they remember is the fleshpots of Egypt, not the whips and the bricks. They go even so far as to call Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey (Num 16:13). Once they had to slave for their bread under the lash. Now they pick up manna for free. But impatience has clouded their memory.

Tertullian: “Although they were there nourished with divine supplies, nevertheless [they] were more mindful of their belly and their gullet than of God” (*ANF* 3:679). (TLSB)

*we detest this miserable food!* The people’s impatience (v. 4) led them to blaspheme God, to reject his servant Moses and to despise the bread from heaven. This is the most bitter of their several attacks on the manna (see note on 11:7). Just as Moses’ attack on the rock was more than it appeared to be (see note on 20:11), so the people’s contempt for the heavenly bread was more serious than one might think. Rejecting the heavenly manna was tantamount to spurning God’s grace (cf. Jn 6:32–35, 48–51, 58). (CSB)

**21:6** *fiery serpents*. Hbr *nechashim seraphim*; similar to the word for “bronze” The wordplay may refer to the shiny, metallic brown appearance of some species of adder. (TLSB)

*fiery*. May also describe the pain that accompanied the animals’ bites. (TLSB)

**21:7** *We have sinned*. A second time, the people resort to prayer, which shows they begin to understand the way of life in which the Lord will lead them: sin, repentance, restoration, and service. (TLSB)

**21:8–9** In response to the people’s confession of sin (v. 7), God directed Moses to make an image of a snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who had been bitten could look at it and live. (See the typological use of this incident in Jn 3:14–15).(CSB)

**21:8** MAKE A SNAKE AND PUT IT UP ON A POLE – Israel had confessed its sin after a rebellion one other time in Numbers (14:40). But then they went out without the Lord’s presence and were defeated (14:41-45). Their confession was shallow; they believed they could fulfill the promises of the Lord through their own efforts. This background of the earlier confession helps explain why the Lord does not simply get rid the serpents immediately. The bronze serpent by itself does not have the power to heal (as Israel mistakenly believed, 2 Kings 18:4). No, it is the serpent connected with the promise of the Lord that brings life.

Hbr term also used to describe a sign, which could likewise mean a miracle, as in “signs and wonders.” God’s word of promise made the healing possible. The Fathers held that this pole/sign was in the shape of a cross. Just: “Moses, by the inspiration and influence of God, took brass, and made it into the figure of a cross” (*ANF* 1:183). See Basil (*NPNF* 2 8:299). (TLSB)

**21:9** *bronze serpent*. Hbr *nechash nechsheth*. God spared those who accepted the means of rescue He provided. Healing did not magically emanate from the coiled piece of metal but depended on faith in the power of God’s Word. Cyril of Jerusalem: “That brazen serpent was hung up as a remedy for the biting serpents, not as a type of Him that suffered for us, but as a contrast; and it saved those who looked upon it, not because they believed it to live, but because it was killed, and killed with it the powers that were subject to it, being destroyed as it deserved” (*NPNF* 2 7:431). Cyril of Jerusalem: “Whoso had been bitten by the living serpent, and looked to the brasen serpent, might be saved by believing” (*NPNF* 2 7:87). John Wycliffe: “Christ, in his own person … [is] the sacrament of sacraments.… Jesus our living serpent, having the likeness of sin upon him, though he could not possibly sin, was suspended on the cross, that those who are stung by the poison of the old serpent, sin, may become spiritually whole” (*TT*, pp 157–58). Later, when its healing power was not attributed to the Creator but to the creature, the bronze serpent was destroyed by King Hezekiah (2Ki 18:4). His action was necessary because serpents were the idolatrous object of veneration among the earliest peoples. But the rescue from death that God wrought through the bronze serpent was only a type of what He intended when His incarnate Son bore our sin and was lifted to the cross. When faith looks up to Christ crucified, God saves from eternal death all victims of the fatal venom of sin (Jn 3:14–18, 36). Irenaeus of Lyons: “The law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God; nay, but it even exhorted them so to do, saying that men can be saved in no other way from the old wound of the serpent than by believing in Him who, in the likeness of sinful flesh, is lifted up from the earth upon the tree of martyrdom, and draws all things to Himself, and vivifies the dead” (*ANF* 1:465). (TLSB)

HE LIVED – This account is especially dear to people of the NT because Jesus pointed to it in John 3. Just as the Israelites were from the poison of the snakes when they looked in faith toward the bronze snake, so believers of all ages can look to Christ in faith and be saved from the spiritual poison of sin. (PBC)

**21:4–9** As Moses guides God’s people in the direction of the Red Sea, away from their primary objective of the Promised Land, rebellion begins anew. Our lives also persist in the pattern of rebellion, repentance, and restoration. Those in Israel who repented received God’s salvation by looking to the sign of His mercy in faith (v 9). What an excellent precursor of God’s redemption through the cross. Those who look upon the cross in faith are saved. • Gracious Lord, send Your Holy Spirit to deepen our faith in Christ, that we live by daily repentance and faith in Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE

Ephesians 2:1-10

*Made Alive in Christ*

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ﻿2﻿ in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ﻿3﻿ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature﻿a﻿ and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ﻿4﻿ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ﻿5﻿ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ﻿6﻿ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ﻿7﻿ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ﻿8﻿ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ﻿9﻿ not by works, so that no one can boast. ﻿10﻿ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

**Structure and Rhetoric**

Paul’s rhetorical creativity and theological energy is not exhausted by the two grand sentences that filled chapter 1. He continues with one of the most beautiful, elegant, and Gospel-rich passages in the NT. As the chiastic structure demonstrates , 2:1–10 forms a neatly defined, well-balanced p 297 unit. Within it, however, lie three clear sentences: 2:1–7; 2:8–9; and 2:10. The first sentence falls into two parts: our dead condition in sin (2:1–3) and God’s saving work in Christ (2:4–7). The next two sentences, as indicated by the conjunction γάρ, “for, since,” beginning each (2:8, 10), are explanatory of two key points made in the first sentence: saved by grace, not works (2:8–9), and transferred from walking in sins to walking in God-given good works (2:10). (CC)

The first, lengthy sentence can be quite confusing if its grammatical structure is missed. It begins with an accusative, “you” (2:1), which is not readily identified as a direct object until the main verbs are reached in 2:5–6. In between, the description of “you” (2:1a) as formerly “dead in your trespasses and sins” (2:1b) leads Paul into a lengthy digression on the nature of this spiritual death, as found among both Gentiles (2:1–2) and Jews (2:3). But these subordinate clauses do not cause any severe anacoluthon (disruption of the sentence’s grammar), as the sentence resumes in 2:4 with the introduction of its grammatical subject, “God.” If we were to rearrange things into a “normal” subject-verbobject order, the sentence would look like this: (CC)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subject: | 4aGod |
| Verbs: | 5bmade alive together, 6raised together, and seated together |
| Objects: | 1–2you [Gentiles] who were dead in your trespasses and sins,  3all of us [Jews], who once conducted ourselves according to passions,  5aus [Jews and Gentiles] who were dead in our trespasses. |

This prompts the question of why Paul should choose such a convoluted sentence structure, when, from the perspective of modern English writing style at least, he might have done it much more simply. The answer lies in the broader structure that encompasses all ten verses. First, there is a basic flow of plightsolution-result that is made possible by putting the direct object first: (CC)

2:1–3 Dead in trespasses and sins

↓

2:4–9 Resurrection with Christ by the grace of God

↓

2:10 New life walking in works prepared by God

But an even stronger pattern is at work, indeed the strongest pattern in Semitic literature (and not unknown among the Greeks): the extended chiasm. The pattern is marked out by the *inclusio* (bracketing) of περιπατέω, “to walk,” in 2:2 and 2:10. But beyond this framing, often noted by commentators, there is a highly sophisticated balance of content between the two parts of the pericope. The chiasm is marked out in the following paraphrase, with key terms underlined: (CC)

p 298 A You Gentiles were dead in sins, walking according to the age of this world,

B following the evil spirit who is at work in the disobedient sons,

C among whom also we [Jews] were, following the passions of the flesh and thoughts;

D thus, we [Jews], too, by nature deserved God’s wrath like the rest of mankind;

E but God, rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us,

[A] even us, who were dead in sins,

F [God] made alive together with Christ,

G —by grace you have been saved!—

F′ and God raised us and seated us together in heaven in Christ,

E′ that he might show the richness of his grace in Christ.

D′ For by grace you have been saved through faith;

C′ this is not from yourselves, but God’s gift,

B′ not from your works, lest anyone should boast.

A′ God has re-created us in Christ to walk in good works.

What is the significance of the chiasm? First, there is an in-out movement by which the depths of man’s plight are introduced step-by-step and then undone step-by-step by God’s actions. For each failure, lack, or rebellious act on man’s part there is a corresponding act of redemption or gift on God’s part. The old walk in trespasses and sins is replaced by walking in good works. Slavery to the devil is replaced by a new creation in Christ. Desires of the sinful flesh are replaced by God’s gift from outside ourselves. Our sinful nature’s work is replaced by the grace of God. Wrath gives way to salvation. (CC)

Second, the chiasm highlights the unit’s key theme. A chiastic structure normally functions quite differently from ordinary prose, replacing an inexorable forward movement with a spiral toward the center. The chief thing is found not at the end but in the middle. Thus, the pericope does not aim toward the good works of 2:10 as its goal, but focuses on the grace of God in its center. The chiastic structure explains the location of Paul’s great interjection, “by grace you have been saved!” (2:5), which interrupts the pericope’s three main verbs. (CC)

The three main verbs (and their objects) are “made us alive together with” in 2:5, preceding the interjection, and “raised [us] together” and “seated [us] together” in 2:6, following the interjection. (CC)

Clustered in the middle are the great saving actions of God that are rooted in his grace. The ancient lector was trained to find these structures in his preparation and to highlight them in his reading; the ancient listener was attuned to the emphasis placed on the center of the chiasm. (CC)

p 299 The chiasm highlights the pericope’s division into two parts (2:1–3 and 2:4–10), which, in theological terms, correspond to the distinction between Law and Gospel. The first three verses are dominated by language of the Law. Paul reveals the forces at work to control the sinner, the unholy triumvirate of sin, death, and the devil or “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.” The sinner under their control is barreling downhill toward the gaping maw of hell (Is 5:14), where Satan claims his own and God’s wrath is vented. In the second part of the pericope (2:4–10), the distinctive language of the Gospel dominates: “grace” (2:5, 7, 8), “gift” (2:8), “in/with Christ” (2:5, 6, 7, 10), “faith” (2:8), re-creation (“created,” 2:10), and “what he [God] has made” (2:10). Wrath is averted by rescue. It is a movement from old life to new life, brought about by the transformative power of God’s paschal actions in Christ. (CC)

This pericope has been called the most succinct presentation of Paul’s theology (despite the fact that it uses σῷζω, “save” [2:5, 8], to described our present condition rather than Paul’s more usual verb δικαιόω, “justify”; see the first textual note on 2:8). The letter to the Ephesians has been seen as a compendium of Pauline theology; one early theorist even suggested that it was written by a student of Paul to introduce a collected edition of his epistles! If Ephesians were a circular letter, a catholic epistle, it would make perfect sense that Paul would begin the body of the letter with such a general statement of his Gospel.74 Yet the circular theory does little justice to the place of this pericope in the letter as a whole, nor to the question of why Paul wrote these words to the *Ephesians* (1:1). (CC)

In the ancient practice of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, the body of a discourse began with a series of “proofs” that put forth an argument in favor of the speaker’s thesis. At the end of this series, the speaker would deal with the presumed objections of the opposition, which he would proceed to refute. The introduction has proposed that 2:1–4:16 consists of a series of “proofs” for the thesis that Jews and Gentiles are united baptismally in Christ, followed by “refutations” of the notion that Gentiles might still live like the unbaptized or be joined again to their false worship (4:17–6:9). Commentators divide into camps and argue fiercely whether “you” (2:1) and “we” (2:3) indicate that the Jew/Gentile question is already in view at this point in the epistle, but they are generally agreed that this is the case by 2:11. The epistle’s pericopes, however, cannot be so atomized and isolated from one another. Certainly Paul does not make the distinction between Gentile and Jew explicit in 2:1–10 (though our textual notes have contended that this is implied by “you” Gentiles in 2:1 and “we” Jews in 2:3). Yet Paul is already busy assembling a coherent argument that will reach its crowning glory in the great unity hymn of 4:4–6. His first proof consists in the nature of the Gospel itself. If it is true that we all are united in p 300 sin and that we all are united by God in Christ, if we are united in death and in resurrection, then the foundation has been laid for his later conclusion that we are united also with one another. Explicitly stated or not, the thesis depends on the truth of the Gospel expressed here. This unit presents the most general proof, but also the most profound. Its very generality and foundational character explains why it has become such a beloved summary of the Christian faith, even where the original Ephesian context fades from view. (CC)

**2:1–10** In ch. 1 Paul wrote of the great purposes and plan of God, culminating in the universal headship of Christ (1:10), all of which is to be for “the praise of his glory” (1:14). He now proceeds to explain the steps by which God will accomplish his purposes, beginning with the salvation of individuals. (CSB)

The movement of the pericope is from death to life. The thought is prompted by consideration of Christ’s exaltation (1:20–22). Christ, who was put to death for our transgressions, was vindicated by God, restored to his rightful place of honor, lifted up to the right hand of God. Because Paul had already declared that the Father “has blessed us with every blessing of the Spirit in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3), he draws the conclusion that we who are “in Christ” have also died and risen to new life. But this deduction is qualified by the persistence of the present age, in which we have the pledge and seal, but not the acquisition of the eternal inheritance (1:13–14). During this age the eternal resurrection of the body has been fully experienced only by Christ, the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20, 23). Until the fulfillment at the dawn of the coming age, those who are “in Christ” experience the resurrection only proleptically; they have eternal life (Jn 5:24), but it is not yet visible to the eyes or fully realized in our bodies.

**2:1-3** Whether or not it be accepted that Paul already has in mind the division between Jew and Gentile that becomes explicit in the following section (2:11–22), a clear twofold argument for the unity of all in Christ is at work in this pericope. When Paul refers to his Gentile Christian audience’s former life under the dominion of Satan’s forces, he is not thereby intending to distinguish them from their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters. Nor, when he asserts of himself and his fellow Jewish Christians that “we all once conducted ourselves in the passions of our flesh … like the rest” (2:3) does he mean to imply that Gentile Christians were somehow free from this fleshly disease. The purpose is not to separate but to unite all people, whether Jew or Greek, under the single, crushing condemnation of God’s Law. (CC)

Thus, we find in 2:1–3 an epitome of the method Paul developed at length in the opening chapters of Romans (1:18–3:31). For if the Gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16), it must first be demonstrated that both parties were equally in need of that great power. Rom 1:18–32 exposes the hopeless state of p 305 all Gentiles on the basis of God’s condemnation written on their conscience. Rom 2:17–29 proves that the Jew, who has the written Law of God, is no more capable of keeping it than the supposedly lawless Gentile. With a series of sweeping summary statements, Paul hammers home his conclusions: “All who have sinned without the Law without the Law will also perish; and all who sinned under the Law through the Law will be condemned” (Rom 2:12). “What then? Are we [Jews] better off? Not at all! For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin” (Rom 3:9). “For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and lack the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). This is what Paul means by his brief summary of the object of God’s saving deeds: “even *us*, when we were dead in [our] trespasses” (Eph 2:5). This “us” comprehends both the Gentiles, who likewise once were “dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1) and “walked” according to the ruler of this age (2:2; cf. Gal 4:8), and the Jews, who likewise did the will “of the flesh” and its “thoughts” (Eph 2:3; cf. Titus 3:3). (CC)

**2:1** YOU WERE DEAD – καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας—The conjunction καί, “and,” connects this pericope to the preceding: the same, powerful God who raised and exalted Christ (1:20–23) has raised and exalted “also you” (as καὶ ὑμᾶς could be translated). As καὶ ὑμεῖς, “also you” (1:13), distinguished new Gentile Christians in Ephesus from Jewish Christians who had first hoped in Christ (1:12), so here the referent of “you” is the Ephesian Christians of a Gentile background. Eph 2:2 makes this identification clear and more certain than in 1:12–13: although the devil tempts all to sin, only Gentiles could accurately be accused of having followed evil spirits (idolatry). The identification is made explicit in 2:11 by “you Gentiles in the flesh” (cf. 4:17). The older, Jewish portion of the church (with Paul) is introduced as “we” in 2:3, a group who may not have been enslaved by demons, but who nonetheless followed their sinful desires and were equally under God’s wrath. (CC)

Syntactically ὑμᾶς (“you [Gentiles]”) is a suspended accusative: Paul introduces and elaborates on the *object* of the main verb first (2:1–2); then he digresses onto a p 280 second object, “we [Jews]” (2:3); finally he introduces the *subject*, “God” (2:4), after which he reintroduces the two objects combined into “us” (2:5a). The main verbs themselves do not appear until 2:5b–6. From 2:4 onward, “us” and “you” are inclusive of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. In light of the particle ποτε, “once” (2:2), the participle ὄντας must be temporal: “*when* you were …” (CC)

νεκρούς—“Dead in trespasses” is repeated in 2:5 and paralleled in Col 2:13. The theme reappears in the hymn of Eph 5:14, where spiritual death is compared to sleep and Baptism to awakening through the light of Christ. The nonliteral use of “death” for spiritual inactivity or incapacity is found in Christ’s words about unbelieving Israelites (Mt 8:22 || Lk 9:60). In the parable, the prodigal son is called “dead” because he was lost to his father and living a dissolute life (Lk 15:24, 32). Those who are spiritually dead are marked out by their lack of God-pleasing works (Heb 6:1; 9:14; James 2:17, 26; Rev 3:1; cf. 1 Jn 3:14); thus, the lives of the Gentiles are characterized by their sins. (CC)

Death is also the work brought about by God’s Law, as it kills self-righteousness and rebellion, preparing the way for the Gospel to bring life or punishing eternally those who refuse the Gospel: Mt 10:28; Rom 6:23; 7:10–11; 8:10; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 2:19; Eph 2:16. (CC)

Because this is not “death” in the usual sense of the term, some interpreters soften it, suggesting that man is severely weakened by sin, but not completely incapable of reaching out to God (semi-Pelagianism). But Paul’s avoidance of simile (he does not say “*as* dead”) and his evocation of the (literal) death and resurrection of Christ suggest otherwise; and he hammers home his meaning with the phrases “not from yourselves” and “not from works” (2:8–9), as well as “what he has made” and “created [by God *ex nihilo*]” (2:10). (CC)

Spiritual death means that man is completely unable to make a move toward God. Such death is not figurative, but “nonliteral” only in the sense that it is different from the kind of death we normally ponder (of the body); it is actually a more profound and real kind of death, being “alienated from the life of God” (4:18), embracing or leading to physical death as its inevitable consequence. In this state, man’s only hope is that rebirth which brings to life a new man. The baptismal reference is made explicit in the parallel: “… being buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of the God who raised him from the dead, and you—when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh—he made you alive together with him” (Col 2:12–13; cf. Rom 6:1–4).(CC)

The idea that through a ritual washing a heathen convert passed from death to life was likely current in Judaism already before Paul. The School of Hillel interpreted proselyte baptism as a ritual cleansing necessary because the pagan had been in contact with corpses, that is to say, the spiritually dead. Commenting on the necessity for such a convert to be baptized before participating in the Passover, the School of Hillel judges: “He who separates himself from the uncircumcision is like one who separates himself from the grave” (Mishnah, *Eduyyoth*, 5:2, quoted in Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 108). Whether the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism predates Paul is, however, debated. Scot McKnight, “Proselytism and Godfearers,” *DNTB*, 845, offers a cautious yes. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 120–21, is more confident. Jonathan D. Lawrence, Washing, Ritual,” *EDEJ*, 1331–32, is also positive. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 76–82, is more reluctant to conclude that proselyte baptism predated and influenced Christian Baptism. (CC)

The effective power of Baptism is p 281 the Word of Christ, by which those who hear and believe have “passed from death to life” (Jn 5:24–25; cf. Eph 1:13). (CC)

The same logic underlies Paul’s repeated statement that we were “dead in trespasses (and sins)” (2:1, 5). It arises not from an analysis of the human condition, as if humans were manifestly dead, but is derived from the analogy of Christ. If we were to look at outward appearances, we would find the full spectrum of human morality: the selfless saint, the philanthropist, the upright and generous person, the man on the Clapham omnibus, the perpetrator of “victimless crimes,” the cheat, the swindler, the child abuser, the mass murderer. But Paul allows for no spectrum. And this is more than a demand for utter perfection. It is not simply that “whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). The sinner apart from Christ does not just fall short quantitatively (“nearly good enough”) but also qualitatively (“completely different”). What matters is that everyone lacks that divine life (with its divine holiness and perfection), which is found in Christ. Only in him and in conformity to him can these gifts be given. So Paul looks at the Christian p 301 who is now alive in Christ and concludes that he must have been dead without Christ. (CC)

“It [the statement that the Ephesians were ‘dead’ (2:1, 5)] is equivalent to the confession of many a psalmist and the pronouncement of the Prodigal Son’s father: as it is being proclaimed only after the salvation of the dead and lost man, it must be called [not a *post-mortem* but] a *post-resurrectionem*. Only in the light of the reality of God’s resuscitating power can the reality of man’s former death be recognized” (Barth, *Ephesians*, 1:233). (CC)

This logic explains why the image of death in Christ appears with such frustrating inconsistency in Paul. There are at least three perspectives on death and life in Paul’s writings. First, in our present pericope, he argues that Gentile Christians were “dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1, 5) before the action of God in Christ brought them life. Effectively, Jewish Christians were in the same coffin (they, too, were “dead in trespasses,” 2:5), even if they had not been enslaved by the demonic forces at work in pagan idolatry. Paul makes no distinction between faithful and unfaithful Jew, orthodox or liberal. All share the same sinful flesh whose desires are diametrically opposed to God’s Law (2:3). Thus, Paul draws together all people (2:3b, 5) under the blanket judgment that they were dead before being incorporated into Christ—and if they were still alive in the flesh, their deadness must have been “in trespasses.” But then, second, we confront Paul’s argument in Romans 6 and Col 2:12, where he teaches that we are put to death and buried with Christ by Baptism into him. This seems to imply that the object of Baptism was alive beforehand, albeit living an ungodly kind of anti-life that needed to be snuffed out through the drowning action of the sacramental flood. Third and finally, reflecting on baptismal theology (Romans 6), Paul recognizes the ongoing work of God’s Law, which continues day by day to put to death the old man (Rom 7:9–11), or rather, it is sin working through the Law that brings such death (Rom 7:13). (CC)

We might despair of bringing any consistency to Paul’s imagery. Are people dead in sins from the moment of their conception? Or are they put to death by Baptism, in which they are buried with Christ? Or are they put to death each day as God’s Law does its work on them? We may speak an appropriate yes to each question without contradicting Paul. For within a few short verses in Colossians Paul can say that you were “buried with him [Christ] in Baptism” (Col 2:12), that “you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh” (2:13), that “you died with Christ to the elemental principles of the cosmos” (2:20), and that you are to “put to death the earthly parts” (Col 3:5). (CC)

Yet this language is not truly inconsistent. On the one hand, Paul confesses that the appearance of life that is found among those born naturally in this world disguises a lack of true, eternal, spiritual life. All people are, in this way, dead without Christ. But Holy Baptism, by uniting the sinner to Christ in everything he underwent, brings a real act of execution to the old man with all his desires. In other words, we were dead with respect to following God, but also needing to p 302 be slain by virtue of our active hostility against him. (CC)

The Formula of Concord illustrates this with its astonishing refutation of any spiritual life in natural man, followed by its swift affirmation of his vitality in opposing God:

Namely, that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of the unregenerate man are utterly unable, by their own natural powers, to understand, believe, accept, think, will, begin, effect, do, work, or concur in working anything, but they are entirely dead to what is good, and corrupt, so that in man’s nature since the Fall, before regeneration, there is not the least spark of spiritual power remaining, nor present, by which, of himself, he can prepare himself for God’s grace, or accept the offered grace, nor be capable of it for and of himself, or apply or accommodate himself thereto, or by his own powers be able of himself, as of himself, to aid, do, work, or concur in working anything towards his conversion, either wholly, or half, or in any, even the least or most inconsiderable part; but that he is the servant [and slave] of sin, John 8:34, and a captive of the devil, by whom he is moved, Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:26. Hence the natural free will according to its perverted disposition and nature is strong and active only with respect to what is displeasing and contrary to God. (FC SD 2:7 [*Triglotta*, 883]; cf. FC SD 2:11, 61; 3:19–20) (CC)

And the ongoing work of the Law, which returns us to our Baptism by daily drowning the old man, simply illustrates the “in between” character of the age in which we exist. As our resurrection with Christ and ascension to heaven is proleptic, anticipating our once-for-all exaltation with the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, so the act of death with Christ is proleptic, bringing forward repeatedly the death of the flesh that comes once and for all at the end of our earthly lives. It is, therefore, foolish to stipulate whether this death to sin happens through hearing the Word, through believing it, through Holy Baptism, or through a repentant return to that event. It has happened, and it goes on happening so long as we are in this age. (CC)

A description of their past moral and spiritual condition, separated from the life of God. (CSB)

Prior to their conversion, they were spiritually dead under the Law’ condemnation (Rom. 5:12-21; 7:9-10), unable to make a single movement toward God (Mt. 8:22; John 5:24-25; Rom. 6:23). “The Scriptures teach that a sinful person is not only weak and sick but also finished and entirely dead” (FC SD II 10). (TLSB)

He is speaking to the Ephesians of Gentile background. Their Jewish counterparts will be addressed later. For now Paul is speaking to Gentiles, and he has some very damaging things to say. (PBC)

Paul describes life before Christ as no life at all. Sin kills. It paralyzes us with a killing force. Sin kills the spirit and the will. What’s more, sin separates from the life God has to give. In this sense, more than in any other, life before Christ is a walking death. (LL)

Corpses can’t move. Dead people can’t do anything; they are totally unable to help themselves. Such was the spiritual plight in which the Gentile Ephesians had found themselves. If any were inclined to question Paul’s diagnosis regarding their spiritual bankruptcy, he urged them to take a look at their lives and actions. (PBC)

IN YOUR TRESSGRESSIONS AND SINS – τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν—The dative is probably of respect, dead “with respect to” sin (not dead in the body), but it could be instrumental, killed “by” sin, or locative as the realm “in which” unbelievers are dead men walking (“walked,” 2:2). παράπτωμα, “trespass,” evokes the image of making a false step so as to lose one’s footing; it derives from παρά + πίπτω, “to fall to the side.” In secular Greek παράπτωμα can be a mere “blunder” or “error in judgment.” In the LXX it occurs only in the Prophets and the Writings; it is used once for a שְׁגִיאָה, “sin of ignorance” (Ps 19:13 [LXX Ps 18:13; ET Ps 19:12]). But it is also used for פֶּשַׁע, “rebellion” against God (e.g., Ezek 14:11; 18:22), and for מַעַל, a “faithless, treacherous act” against him (Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27); this is stronger than a misstep—more like falling off a cliff! In the NT it refers chiefly to an offense against God.7 It is a characteristic way for Paul (who employs sixteen of its nineteen NT occurrences) to describe sin as a violation of God’s commandment, beginning with Adam (Rom 5:15) and continuing in the “stumblings” of every person’s “walk” (cf. Eph 2:2, 5). (CC)

In contrast, the second term here, ἁμαρτία, “sin,” is more general and occurs often in the liturgical sections of the Pentateuch (especially Leviticus with its treatment of the “sin offering”) and throughout the OT and NT. It stresses the moral character of sin as a lack of God’s holiness and describes acts that violate his standards. In line with the secular meaning of “failure to reach a goal,” Paul says that “all have sinned [ἥμαρτον] and lack the glory of God” (Rom 3:23)—so sin involves not missing a target slightly, but coming nowhere near it. (CC)

The distinction between these two near synonyms should not be overdrawn. Paul places them together for emphasis, rhythm, and comprehensiveness. (CC)

**2:2** USED TO LIVE – Imagine a person whose entire perspective on life had been shaped only by television programming. What would such a person’s morality be like? His sexual ethics? His attitude toward violence? The value he placed on life? How strongly would he desire to serve others? The world sets standards different from those of Christ. Life before Christ is lived by a set of standards that usually settle for the lowest common denominator – standards like, “What’s in it for me?” or “How much can I get away with?” or “It worked for them; why shouldn’t it work for me?” So a newspaper reporter observes Mother Teresa washing the sores of a leper and says to her, “I wouldn’t do that for the all the money in the world.” And Mother Teresa responds, “Neither would I.” Two separate worlds with two distinct sets of standards collide in those statements. Before Christ, we blended into the world’s mediocre, self-focused values. After Christ, we adopted a new set of challenging standards, those given us by God. (LL)

ESV has “walked.” This is biblical imagery for conduct before God (Ps. 1; Romans 6:4). Before Christ they were “dead men walking.” (TLSB)

ἐν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε—The enclitic particle ποτέ, “once, formerly,” alludes to the change in life and lordship brought on by these Christians’ baptismal p 282 incorporation into Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:8; see also the commentary on 2:11–22). περιπατέω, “to walk” (2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), might evoke the rabbinic notion of הֲלָכָה, *halakah*, how to walk in the way of the Lord. Unfortunately, the rabbis tended to focus on the ethical component of behavior in the interpretation of God’s commandments. Paul’s use of the verb is closer to the actual OT language of הָלַךְ, “to walk,” a metaphor for the believer’s lifelong relationship with God (see the commentary on 4:17–5:2, titled “The Baptismal Walk: Clothed in Christ”). One’s path is set by the spiritual force (good or evil) that controls one’s life; thus, “walking” leads either to life or death (Deut 30:15–16). The pagan walks “in darkness” (Is 9:1 [ET 9:2]), “in the counsel of the wicked” (Ps 1:1). God’s stubborn people “walked away” from him (Jer 5:23), “walked in their own counsels” (Jer 7:24), each “in the stubbornness of his evil heart” (Jer 11:8). Gentile Christians “once walked” in “fornication” and “idolatry” (Col 3:5–7), in “futility” (i.e., idolatry, Eph 4:17). (CC)

But the child of God walks in his Word, walks in his way (1 Ki 3:14; Jer 7:23), walks “with God” (Gen 5:24; 6:9), and so is deemed blameless (Gen 17:1). (CC)

In passages such as Pss 1:1–2; 119:1, 44, תּוֹרָה, “Torah,” does not mean “Law” but “teaching,” including both Law and the Gospel. (CC)

This is the life of faith (Rom 4:12; 2 Cor 5:7), of new life (Rom 6:4), of the Spirit (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16, 25), of those who flee immorality and live in Christ (Rom 13:13–14), who walk according to God’s calling (Eph 4:1), in Christ’s love (5:2), in the path of light (5:8), and wisely (5:15). To “walk in him [Christ]” is to be “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Col 2:6–7). To walk is thus to believe and trust and so to follow. Christianity is called “the Way” because it involves walking in the path forged by Christ; it is following him along the road to life (E.g., Mt 7:14; 8:22; 16:24; Jn 10:27; Acts 9:2; 18:25; cf. Ex 13:21; Neh 9:19). (CC)

Paul reminds the Ephesian Gentiles that their lives were once walked under the control of evil spiritual forces, a path leading only to death (cf. Eph 4:17). The image of “dead” (2:1, 5) men walking conjures the frightening specter of a zombie-like existence. (CC)

WAYS OF THIS WORLD – In our passage the salient point lies in the words “this world.” This world is mankind estranged from God, the apostolic world. And now the course of this world appears as the determining force for the way of life of the present Gentiles. Not only by their inborn evil nature and constitution and the resultant sinful condition but also by their entire environment. Through the evil world and the evil time in which they lived, they were led into sins and transgressions and held fast therein. (Stoeckhardt)

κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου—This κατά phrase and the following one each define the power formerly controlling the Gentiles’ walk (cf. Rom 8:4; Col 2:8). “The age of this world” is the only period in which God permits these hostile forces any length of leash. Paul can call the devil “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4). “This world” is synecdoche for “this evil world,” viewed not as God’s good creation but as a realm in rebellion against him. See the third textual note on 1:21. Though αἰών had been used as a proper name for a “god of eternity” in Alexandria already in 200 BC, it seems unlikely that Paul would suddenly make such a reference when elsewhere in Ephesians the term has a purely temporal meaning, “age.” (CC)

*ruler.* Satan (cf. Jn 14:30, “prince”). (CSB)

*air.* Satan is no mere earthbound enemy (cf. 6:12). (CSB)

The devil, who operates in “heavenly places” (3:10; 4:27; 6:11, 16). “The Church is Christ’s kingdom, distinguished from the devil’s kingdom” (Ap VII and VIII 16). (TLSB)

κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος—The “air” as a lower level of the heavens (cf. 3:10; 6:12) is the realm in which spiritual forces, both good and evil, do battle, in parallel to and influencing events on earth, which the air touches. “Ruler” and “authority” are the same vocabulary terms Paul applied to the spirits in 1:21 (see the p 283 first textual note on that verse), though here ἐξουσία, “authority,” appears not to designate a rank of spirit but the realm where authority is exercised (as in Lk 4:6; Col 1:13). Here the singular number of τὸν ἄρχοντα, “the ruler,” suggests that the devil is in mind, as the prince of evil spirits. He is a personal opponent of the baptized in the spiritual battle (Eph 4:27; 6:11, 16). Paul’s mandate from the Lord is to preach the Gentiles out of Satan’s authority and into the kingdom of God (Acts 26:18). (CC)

This evil principle, the spirit of disobedience, is located, as it were in the air, is the spiritual atmosphere wherein they live, move, and breathe. It is nothing but sin, disobedience, unrighteousness that the men of this world spiritually inhale and exhale without ceasing. (Stoeckhardt)

He ranges not only in the material world but in the spiritual world as well. (LL)

*spirit.* Satan is a created, but not a human, being (cf. Job 1:6; Eze 28:15; see note on Isa 14:12–15). (CSB)

He was created as an angel and has powers far transcending human might. He seeks especially to turn believers into “those who are disobedient,” persons whom he controls and through whom he works his evil will. (LL)

WHO ARE DISOBEDIENT - a Hebrew expression for one’s character (cf. v. 3). The Gentiles were disobedient unbelievers. By contrast, “son of God” have His holy character (Luke 20:36; Rom. 8:14; Phil. 2:15). (TLSB)

τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας—If, as is likely, τοῦ πνεύματος is in simple apposition to τὸν ἄρχοντα, i.e., “the ruler” *is* “the spirit,” then the accusative case (τό πνεῦμα) would be expected for “the spirit.” The genitive here (τοῦ πνεύματος) may be caused by attraction to the two preceding genitives. The devil is portrayed as an anti-Christ and anti-Spirit. As Christ is the energizing force at work in believers, to give them life (1:19–20), and as the Spirit indwells the sons of God (Rom 8:14–15; Gal 4:6; Eph 5:18), so the devil indwells and directs the disobedient sons (Jn 8:44; 13:2; Acts 13:10; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Tim 2:26). Christians must be aware that the devil is “now” (νῦν) at work, fighting against them, so long as this present age endures. “The sons of disobedience” (cf. 5:6) is a Hebraism used to describe people (males and females) who are characterized in their very nature by rebellion against God and his Law (Rom 2:8), his Gospel and his Son (1 Pet 2:8; 4:17). Disobedience entails unbelief (Jn 3:36; Heb 3:18–19). But there is yet hope that such people may repent and receive mercy (Rom 11:30–32). (CC)

This is the atmosphere of the spirit that now, and in this era, operates in the children of disobedience. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:3** *All of us.* Jews and Gentiles. (CSB)

ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες—The masculine plural pronoun οἷς, “whom,” refers to the preceding “sons of disobedience,” with whom “we” are associated by following our sinful desires. καὶ ἡμεῖς, “also we,” introduces Paul and his fellow (Jewish) Christians, in contrast to “you [Gentiles]” (see the first textual note on 2:1). πάντες, “all,” may imply, however, that the Gentiles shared this addiction to fleshly passions (1 Thess 4:5; 1 Pet 4:3) and forbids us to separate widely the sins of Gentiles from the sins of Jews. Paul’s point is not to distinguish the two groups but to include both under the Law’s condemnation. As in Romans 1–3 (like Amos 1–2), he demonstrates the equal status of Gentile and Jew before God beginning with their inability to please him, indeed their p 284 rebellion against him. Jew and Gentile are first united by their sinfulness (Rom 3:9, 22–23) before they can be united in the grace of Christ (Eph 2:5–8; see also Romans 4–5). (CC)

ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε—The aorist passive form ἀνεστράφημεν, with an active meaning, is from ἀναστρέφω, “to conduct oneself,” an infrequent near synonym of περιπατέω, “to walk” (2:2). (CC)

The word with this meaning occurs also in 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 10:33; 13:18; 1 Pet 1:17; 2 Pet 2:18. (CC)

It may lean more toward actions in the moral sphere, as the rest of this verse suggests. Paul later uses the cognate noun ἀναστροφή to refer to the Ephesians’ former “way of life,” their old man, that was stripped off at their Baptism (4:22). (CC)

That is to say: among whom also we Jewish Christians once, while we were still Jews, wandered about in the lusts of our flesh. “Among whom” - the Jews, did not only live among the Gentiles but belonged in the same category with them, the children of disobedience, were also disobedient unto God. Just as the Gentiles opposed natural law, so the Jews opposed the revealed law. (Stoeckhardt)

Here. As in Romans 1:2, the apostle concludes Gentiles and Jews under sin, under disobedience - only that there he describes disobedience according to its detailed expressions and appearances, while in our passage he briefly sketches it according to its leading features and leads it back to its source: original corruption. (Stoeckhardt)

The remark is hardly necessary that Paul is here not looking at the believing, pious Israelites of the OT Covenant, who were also by nature sinful and were through God’s power and grace freed from sin’s corruption. (Stoeckahrdt)

Paul had charged the Ephesian Gentile with course and sinful actions. For himself and his fellow Jews Paul now admits to sinful thoughts and desires. (PBC)

God’s law, given to Israel on Mount Sinai, guided and regulated nearly every phase of Jewish life. As such, the law held in check among the Jews many of the coarse outbreaks of sin that were scandalously common among the Gentiles. But even this outward Jewish decency wasn’t the full complete obedience that a holy God rightly expects and deserves. Their very nature - hearts, minds, and attitudes - was tainted to the core. That showed itself in their “gratifying the cravings of (their) sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.” (PBC)

GRATIFYING THE CRAVINGS – A few examples: Abortion, business corruption, cohabitation, homosexuality, political correctness (there is more than one truth), spiritual laxity among Christians. – The word Paul uses for cravings carries the idea of wanting that which is forbidden, seeking that which is clearly wrong. Before Christ, our glands speak louder than our brains or our conscience. We follow our appetites. Like Big Bellied Ben in the old nursery rhyme, we eat the church, we eat the steeple, we eat the town, we eat the people. Our insatiable desires take us to extremes – as when in ancient Rome they built vomitoria in homes so that the gorged could regurgitate and return and eat more. (LL)

With the lusts and desires of the flesh one first of all thinks of the lower, common, sensual inclinations and lusts: un-chastity, lewdness, impurity of all kinds. But even the nobler, intellectual powers and abilities of man, as reason, understanding, are corrupt. Only unholy thoughts arise from the inborn nature and direct the will to evil. Also the apparently good, reasonable and intelligent reflections and deliberations of natural man are an ungodly form and set the will in motion against God. And so everything that natural man does, even what appears to be good and commendable, is the work of the flesh. (Stoeckhardt)

ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν—The preposition ἐν, “in,” introduces the controlling power in the Jewish Ephesians’ walk apart from Christ. The noun ἐπιθυμία can be a morally neutral “craving” (1 Thess 2:17; Rev 18:14) or a “desire” for noble things (Lk 22:15; Phil 1:23), but overwhelmingly in the NT it refers to a “passion” for something forbidden, a base “desire” that needs to be overcome by a higher, spiritual force (1 Pet 1:14–15). (

Particularly in Stoic thinking, ἐπιθυμία was a lower instinct of the flesh that needed to be controlled or eliminated by reason. The NT accords reason (which is equally fallen) no such ability; only the Holy Spirit can overcome ἐπιθυμία. (CC)

The genitive τῆς σαρκός, “of the flesh,” confirms this; “flesh” here refers not to the body as a morally neutral component of man’s makeup (as in 2:11; 6:5, 12), but to that corrupt nature which presses him toward sin (Rom 7:5, 14, 18). The genitive is subjective, “the flesh that has passions,” not objective, “passions for flesh.” (CC)

“Flesh” thus refers to body and soul together, insofar as they are unregenerate.

Luther: “Paul calls everything ‘flesh’ that is born of the flesh—the whole man, with body and soul, mind and senses—because everything about him longs for the flesh.… Paul calls heresy and hatred ‘works of the flesh’ [Gal 5:19–21]. And in Romans 8[:3] he says that ‘the law is weakened by the flesh’; yet this is said not of unchastity, but of all sins, and above all of unbelief, which is the most spiritual of all vices” (“Preface to Romans” [1522/1546], AE 35:371–72). (CC)

“Passions of the flesh” does not necessarily refer to sexual sins—though that is often the implication does not necessarily refer to sexual sins—though that is often the implication of ἐπιθυμία, “passion” (Col 3:5)—but is equivalent to “covetousness” (Rom 7:8; Ninth/Tenth Commandments), which is the launching pad for all sin (James 1:14–15). (CC)

The phrase “passion(s) of the flesh” occurs also in Gal 5:16; 2 Pet 2:18; 1 Jn 2:16; cf. Rom 13:14. (CC)

The flesh of Christ, by contrast, is the medium for redeeming and rehabilitating our sinful flesh (Eph 2:14; 5:29–31); to be baptismally clothed with his flesh smothers the passions of our flesh (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:24). By appealing to a universal, sinful human failing—fleshly passions—Paul draws Jews under the same lawful condemnation as Gentiles and prepares them for the same solution in Christ. (CC)

The grosser and more animal propensities. A life of indulgence in whatever natural feelings may arise in us – be they right or wrong. (Pulpit Commentary)

OF OUR SINFUL NATURE – Paul here writes of a fallen nature without God. It is our natural tendency as sinners to do as sinners to do the wrong, to lay ourselves wide open to temptation and sin. Jesus described sins coming “from within, out of men’s hearts.” He said, “All these (sins) come from the inside…(Mark 7:20-23). That warped inside of us is our sinful nature. (LL)

ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν—This restatement of the controlling power at work in men before their incorporation into Christ confirms our interpretation of the preceding words. The participle ποιοῦντες, “doing,” expresses the manner of conduct, supplementing the main verb ἀνεστράφημεν, “we conducted p 285 ourselves.” “Flesh” (σαρκός in the preceding textual note) is no worse (asceticism) or better (hedonism) than διάνοια, “mind/thought”; both share the same “passions” (ἐπιθυμίαις) or “desires” (θελήματα) that are contrary to the mind of Christ. The genitives are again subjective: “flesh” and “mind/thoughts” drive the “desires.” The plural of διάνοια occurs only here in the NT and should probably be translated as “thoughts” (cf. 2 Macc 2:2; Sirach 3:24); it is comprehensive in attributing evil to all our thoughts. Again Paul attributes to Jews a sinful faculty that is characteristic of Gentiles (who are “darkened in their mind/understanding,” Eph 4:18; cf. Col 1:21). θέλημα in Ephesians (and the rest of the NT) normally refers to God’s “plan and will” (see the third textual note on 1:1 and the fifth textual note on 1:5). Its application to the will of the flesh is rare (Jn 1:13; 1 Cor 7:37; cf. Lk 23:25), but clear in meaning in the context here. (CC)

Romans 7:15-25 “﻿15﻿ ﻿ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ﻿16﻿ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ﻿17﻿ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ﻿18﻿ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.﻿For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ﻿19﻿ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ﻿20﻿ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ﻿21﻿ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ﻿22﻿ For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ﻿23﻿ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ﻿24﻿ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ﻿25﻿ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin”

*objects of wrath.* See Ro 1:18–20; 2:5; 9:22. (CSB)

Before Christ, God’s condemnation was our only inheritance (Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:5-6). (TLSB)

καὶ ἤμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς—“Children of wrath” stands in parallel to “the sons of disobedience” (2:2), though the genitive is subtly different. Rather than expressing an inherited characteristic (“disobedience”), ὀργῆς, “of wrath,” describes what is coming to the “children.” They are “destined to receive [God’s] wrath.” The noun φύσις, “nature,” refers to what something is in its natural condition, for humans in this age from conception and birth. Only here in the NT does the context suggest that φύσις refers to the “sinful nature” inherited from Adam; thus, φύσει, “by nature,” expresses the doctrine of original sin, or “sin of origin.” (CC)

“We speak of ‘nature’ in two ways. When we are speaking strictly of nature itself we mean the nature in which humanity was originally created—after God’s own image and without fault. The other way we speak of nature refers to that fallen sin nature, in which we are self-deceived and subject to the flesh as the penalty for our condemnation” (Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 81, ACCS 8:130). (CC)

The metaphor of “children” is thereby pressed farther to explain that each generation is like the previous one because they share the same Adamic flesh, a common spiritual DNA. This early part of Ephesians continues to share the thought-world of Rom 5:12–21. If it might perhaps be objected that *Gentiles* are sinful because of their environment, Paul, by pointing to their fleshly inheritance, allows *Jews* no room to escape: they are conceived and born sinful because their parents were. (CC)

By contrast, the Stoics taught that living by nature was true living. Some Jewish writers had asserted that only Gentiles are by nature under God’s judgment (Wis Sol 13:1–14:31), while the giving of the Torah preserved Jews from the degeneration of their nature (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4:193). Cf. Helmut Köster, “φύσις κτλ.,” *TDNT* 9:274–75. (CC)

The only remedy is the creation of a new, godly nature (2 Pet 1:4), brought about by a new birth. (CC)

ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί—The expression οἱ λοιποί, “the rest,” is common enough for “other people,” but occasionally, as here, has the connotation of “the unbelieving masses” (Lk 18:11; 1 Thess 4:13; 5:6). With this phrase Paul levels the playing field for Jews and Gentiles, who stand equally under God’s condemnation (apart from Christ). This prepares for uniting them with one great “us” (2:5) as the object of God’s saving power. (CC)

Life apart from Christ is life in the hands of an angry God. (LL)

Paul paints a grim picture. All people are by nature spiritually dead, totally unable to change their condition. Not only are they unable to improve their lot, but they are the objects of an offended God’s wrath. They can expect nothing but the harshest of punishment – and that for all eternity. (PBC)

**2:4-10** Martin Franzmann (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, p. 186) sees the content of the entire book summarized in 2:10: “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” St. Paul emphasizes that good works are not the means to salvation but the witness to it. By word and deed, God’s people join in “the praise of his glorious grace” (1:6), to “show the incomparable riches of his grace” (2:7), to make known “the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Paul sharply contrasts God’s wrath and mercy. (TLSB)

Who we are is described in 2:1–3: originally “dead in . . . transgressions and sins . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts . . . the objects of [God’s] wrath.” The self-examination of Lent reminds us that these phrases continue to describe the *peccator* side of the *simul* formula, but this Sunday’s text fairly shouts for joy the *justus* side. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**2:4** BUT - This would be a terrifying chapter if not for the fact that Paul can continue with a “but.” That three-letter conjunction is the pivotal point of this chapter, yes, of the whole letter - in fact, of all Scripture. Mankind as a group has made a terrible mess of things. In their wickedness and perversity all people are at odds with God. All are spiritually dead and enemies of God. All deserve the severest punishment. (PBC)

GREAT LOVE FOR US – This is agape love. It speaks of a love and affection that is totally one-way. It all comes from God. Nothing in man the sinner, the God-hater, the spiritual corpse, drew God to him. Love resided only in the heart of God. (PBC)

διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς—As God in “mercy” is “rich,” so his “love” (ἀγάπην) is “great” (πολλήν). Cf. 1 Pet 1:3 (τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος, “his great mercy”). As love alone caused God to elect and redeem Israel (Deut 7:7–8), so love was the sole motivating cause of electing his children in Christ (Eph 1:4c–5) to be like his Son, the Beloved (1:6). Here the prepositional phrase with διά, “because,” gives the cause for the action of the main verbs in 2:5–6, beginning with συνεζωοποίησεν, “he made alive together with.” The combination of the verb ἀγαπάω (“to love”) with its cognate noun ἀγάπη (“love”) in the accusative adds emphasis by giving a place for the qualifying adjective πολύς (“great”): “he loved with a great love.” (CC)

The uniqueness of “*agape* love” has (in the opinion of the present writer) been much overdrawn. The English word “love” is not so terribly inadequate. The freight of ἀγάπη is found not in Greek lexicons but in its NT contextual usage.28 It is a quality in God neither motivated by the loveableness of its object (“dead” men! 2:1, 5), nor p 287 evidencing a mere weakness or pity in him. Love is of God’s very essence (1 Jn 4:16), ever leading him to love those whom he created with his hands and the breath of his mouth. God’s love was manifested in Christ, God taking on the form of the ones he made: “Love caused Your incarnation; Love brought You down to me” (Paul Gerhardt, *LSB* 334:4). No better definition could be given than Paul’s second combination of the verb and the noun (ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη): “walk in *love*, just as also Christ *loved* us and gave himself up for us as an offering and sacrifice to God with a pleasing fragrance” (5:2). This is the self-sacrificial love of the heavenly Bridegroom for his bride, the church (5:25, 28, 33), the love of the Father for his Son, conveyed by the Son to us (Jn 15:9). (CC)

God is the One who acts out of love ( *agap*ē), mercy ( *heleos*), grace ( *charis*, v 5), and kindness (*chrēstotēs*, v 7). The words are not entirely synonymous; each carries a specific weight. God has seen us as we are, and he has been moved to have mercy on us. (The LXX often uses *heleos* for *chesed* and *chrēstotēs* for *tov*, two key Gospel terms.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 John 3:1 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”

RICH IN MERCY – eleos – For no other reason, God has rescued men and women from death and given them life. God’s mercy is his overflowing active compassion, freely exercised, excluding all idea of merit on the part of the object. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει—To sinners oppressed by the power of the devil and his forces, including the flesh and its desires, “but God!” sounds forth like a trumpet call in battle. This nominative (ὁ θεός) is the long-awaited subject of the complex, inverted sentence that began with its first direct object in 2:1. The noun ἔλεος, “mercy,” is a kindness or concern expressed for someone in need; with God it is a defining characteristic and is related to his covenant promises. In the LXX ἔλεος commonly translates חֶסֶד, “loving-kindness, faithful graciousness.” This is the covenant faithfulness expressed in God’s very name: he is “YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious [חַנּוּן; LXX: ἐλεήμων, ‘merciful’], slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [רַב־חֶסֶד; LXX: πολυέλεος, ‘very merciful’] and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). (See also Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2) The characterization of God as “rich [πλούσιος] in mercy” brings the same gracious answer to mankind’s predicament that Paul previously offered in Romans: “for God locked all [Jew and Gentile, Rom 11:25, 30–31] into disobedience that he might have mercy [ἐλεήσῃ] upon all” (Rom 11:32). As there is nothing in us deserving new life (Eph 2:8b), God’s mercy is its only cause (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3, both referring to God’s action in Baptism). The application of his mercy to Jews overturns their rebellion (Hos 1:7), and its application to Gentiles incorporates them into the people of God (1 Pet 2:10). The richness of God’s mercy ensures that it overflows beyond the overwhelming tide of mankind’s sinfulness and coincides with the Ephesian theme of God’s abundance. (CC)

Mercy is a positive quality that certainly has much in common with love. But it is also somewhat different. Mercy is the attitude in the mind and heart of God that moves Him to take pity on us when He sees our lost and wretched state. Mercy prompts Him to action. (PBC)

Psalm 103:17 “But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—

Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

**2:5-6** MADE US ALIVE (5) RAISED US UP (6) SEATED US – The same factors apply to the gift of new life confessed in Eph 2:5–6: God “made [us] alive together with Christ … and he raised [us] together and seated [us] together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” It is entirely contrary to Paul’s argument to reduce this act of resurrection to a single, future event, which is only put in the aorist tense

The three main Greek verbs in 2:5–6 are aorist tense, which usually refers to a past completed action. (CC)

as a sort of prophetic future, which is sure and certain but as yet has no reality. (CC)

E.g., “in the light of God’s foreknowledge, Paul is speaking of what is to come as though it had already been done” (Jerome, *Ephesians*, 1:2.1, ACCS 8:132). (CC)

Paul’s point is that we are so truly united to Christ in Baptism that we also truly experience what he has experienced. We have risen and ascended. (CC)

Some have suggested that this language goes beyond the Paul of Romans, who saw in Baptism our death with Christ (Rom 6:3) but reserved resurrection for an eschatological fulfillment (Rom 6:4–5). Yet Rom 6:11 clearly sees the Christian as already “alive to God in Christ Jesus.” In this same section of Romans, Paul moves on to the more outrageous claim that “those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). It is no wonder that Paul’s strong proleptic statements were sometimes misunderstood as if to say that the resurrection p 303 of the dead had already happened, that the resurrection does not matter, or that there is nothing left to be fulfilled (1 Cor 4:8; 2 Tim 2:18). What they misunderstood, but Paul recognized, was that the reality of our new existence in Christ remains hidden in this age: “for you have died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God; but when Christ is manifested, who is our life, then also you will be manifested with him in glory” (Col 3:3–4). (CC)

Clearly, Paul’s claims about present Christian existence are not based on observable phenomena in the Christian life, but on observing the Christ in whom the Christian lives. Like Romans 6–8, this section of Ephesians applies to the Christian each creedal statement about Christ that has first been confessed in Eph 1:20–21: resurrection, ascension, glorification, and triumph over all the spiritual hosts of darkness. We cannot know what incipient-Gnostic ideas might have challenged the Ephesian Christians, though it is a safe bet that their context was little different from that of Colossae, where syncretistic false teachers offered an alternate path of access to higher, heavenly matters through denial of the flesh and appeal to spiritual agents (Col 2:8–23). Paul’s trump card is that in Christ the Christian has already been raised far above such things. His imperative to the Colossians to “seek the things that are above” is based on the indicative “since you have been raised with Christ” (Col 3:1). (CC)

Paul describes not what we *should* be but what we *are*. This makes it Gospel, not third use of the Law. A parallel might be drawn to the full rights of citizenship an infant has already at birth even if the infant is unaware and does not actively use them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Paul uses three aorist verbs, denoting onetime action in the past, to show that what Christ did (1:20) *included* us—a much stronger concept than just being done *for* us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Though we were dead, God made us alive with Christ (vivification), raised us up with Christ (resurrection), and seated us with Christ (enthronement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

It would be inadequate to say here that we are in a continual process of vivification so that some day we will be raised from the dead. Nor does Paul say these were done “in” Christ, as though what he did was symbolic or substitutionary. No; the thing is done. These three verbs, accomplished in our baptism (Rom 6:3–11), will be consummated when we enter the eschaton after Christ’s return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Romans 6:4 “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

**2:5** *made us alive with Christ.* This truth is expanded in Ro 6:1–10. (CSB)

Through Baptism, we were put to death by the judgment of God’s Law and raised as forgiven children (Rom. 6:1-11). (TLSB)

συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ—Here Paul introduces the first of three compound verbs beginning συν-, “together, with”: συνεζωοποίησεν, “he made alive together with”; συνήγειρεν, “he raised together with”; and συνεκάθισεν, “he seated together with.” Taken together with 2:19, 21, 22; 3:6; 4:3, 16; 5:7, 11, this is the densest concentration of such compounds in the NT. The prepositional prefix συν-, “together, with,” points to τῷ Χριστῷ: God acts upon us “with Christ.” Yet there remains more than just a hint of “with one another” (Cf. 1 Cor 5:11; 2 Cor 7:3; Phil 2:25)—if God included all of us in Christ, then he also united us *with one another* (1 Cor 15:22). This thought is not yet made explicit, but the foundation is laid for Paul’s later arguments (Eph 3:6). These shared acts of salvation form part of Paul’s appeal to unity. Most important is to be with Christ, but we are not there alone. (CC)

The baptismal referent of συνεζωοποίησεν, “he made alive together with,” is made explicit in the Colossian parallel (Col 2:13): (CC)

p 288 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done with [human] hands in the putting off of the fleshly body in the circumcision of Christ, since you were buried with him [συνταφέντες] in Baptism, in which you were also raised to life with [συνηγέρθητε] [him] through faith in the working of the God who raised him from the dead; and you, when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, *he made you alive together with* [συνεζωοποίησεν] him, having forgiven us all [our] trespasses. (Col 2:11–13)

The triply compound verb συζωοποιέω (σύν + ζωός + ποιέω), “make alive *together with*,” occurs only in these two passages (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13) and in later Christian literature dependent on them. The simpler compound form ζωοποιέω (ζωός + ποιέω), when it has the meaning “to make alive” (as opposed to preserving life, Judg 21:14), is the distinctive work of God and his Spirit, “the Lord and giver of life” (Nicene Creed: τὸ κύριον καὶ ζωοποιόν, literally, “the Lord and the one who makes alive”) (See Jn 6:63; Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; 1 Pet 3:18). This “making alive,” which takes place spiritually now in anticipation of the resurrection of the flesh on the Last Day, should not be understood as merely figurative or as any less real. In overcoming spiritual death (cf. Eph 2:1), it is the greater resurrection (Jn 5:24; Rev 2:11; 20:6). (CC)

Following the principle of Rom 11:32, “for God locked all into disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all,” Paul moves directly from wrath to grace. The actions of God are described in Eph 2:5–6 with a series of verbs prefixed with the preposition σύν, “together, with,” that forms the densest concentration of such compounds in the NT: συνεζωοποίησεν, “he made alive together with”; συνήγειρεν, “he raised together with”; and συνεκάθισεν, “he seated together with.” As discussed in the textual notes, there is sufficient evidence to believe that Paul intends “with” to include Jew and Gentile, or at least all Christians, in the orbit of these saving verbs. Thus, in parallel to the act of locking all together into disobedience (Rom 11:32), God joins all people together in having mercy on them. (CC)

Yet it is important to stress that horizontal unity (with one another) is a *consequence* of salvation, but not its ultimate *goal*. More significant to Paul is the union with Christ and reconciliation to God that lay at the heart of the Ephesian prologue (1:3–14). Echoing its language, Paul repeats “with Christ” or “in Christ” four times in the Gospel part of the present pericope (2:4–10). In doing so, he ties together 1:20–21 and 2:1–10 (See also “in Christ” (or “in him/whom/the Beloved”) in 1:1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). The exaltation of Christ is our exaltation. We are “caught up in what happened to Christ.” It is, in the inimitable words of a German, “ein In-Christus-mit-Christus-in-die-Himmel-versetzt-worden-Sein.” All that once characterized our lives has been given up in exchange for what belongs to Christ. (CC)

p 306 Here Paul advances beyond any consequences he has elsewhere drawn from our incorporation into Christ. (CC)

“The statement that God has both raised up believers with Christ and seated them with him in the heavenly realms spells out the implications of the relationship of incorporation in Christ in their most developed form in the Pauline corpus” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 105). (CC)

For not only have we died and risen with him so that we experience new life already in this age, but we have also already ascended and been seated in the heavenly places. Though it is hidden from our fleshly eyes, the eyes of our hearts (1:18) have been opened to see such a magnificent present glorification. Commenting on Psalm 110, the same OT passage Paul previously quoted in Eph 1:22, Luther writes: (CC)

But although David personally had the physical advantage which we do not have, namely, that Christ was to be born of his body, we have just as much reason to be glad and to boast of the honor and glory which we share with David and the holy fathers of the Jewish nation. For in Christ a part of our flesh and blood, that is, our human nature, sits in heaven above at the right hand of God. He wants to be our Lord just as much as the Lord of David and the other fathers. It is an unspeakably great glory and honor for mankind to have been raised so high by Him, not merely to heaven among the holy angels and archangels, who are certainly great and excellent princes and lords, but to the level of direct equality with God Himself. How could the High Majesty become humbler than by honoring this sorry flesh and blood and exalting it through His divine honor and authority? He descends to the level of our nature and becomes a member of the human race! It is an honor which no angel in heaven shares. (CC)

As St. Stephen looked to heaven in his martyrdom, saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, and was given courage to face his death (Acts 7:56–60), so also we look to heaven in faith and see our Brother, our flesh and blood, on the throne and see with confidence our own present and future. Like John, granted a vision of the saints surrounding the Lamb and God’s throne (Rev 7:9–17), we are equipped by the sight of our own ascension with Christ to face a hostile world and all spiritual opposition. It is a stunning consequence of the incarnation that man and God can never again be separated. Christopher Wordsworth sang: (CC)

Thou hast raised our human nature

On the clouds to God’s right hand;

There we sit in heavenly places,

There with Thee in glory stand.

Jesus reigns, adored by angels;

Man with God is on the throne.

Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension

We by faith behold our own.

p 307 For Paul this glorification of humanity happened in principle when Christ became man, suffered, died, rose, and ascended in human flesh. But its application to individual humans took place through an act of appropriation, a work that brought union with Christ. The language of death and resurrection in this pericope makes sufficiently clear a reference to Holy Baptism as the action of God that brought it about. While Baptism is named only once in Ephesians (4:5), it is the subject of continual allusion through the creative language of early Christianity. That death and resurrection with Christ occurs through Baptism is made explicit in Rom 6:1–4 and Col 2:11–13. Extensive parallels of language with Titus 3:4–7 suggest that the same “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” by which God “saved us” (Titus 3:5) is in mind here. Only theologians who stubbornly deny the power of Baptism to accomplish this great work would try to drive a wedge between “conversion” and “initiation” so as to suggest that this text is speaking of one but not the other. (CC)100

No early Christian immersed in Paul’s thought-world would have separated these two acts or missed the allusion to Baptism in this pericope. Our modern need to make everything explicit reflects both our polemical past and our lamentable loss of the poetic. When patristic writers refer to this passage—alluding to the allusion—one set of oblique references replaces another, but the baptismal code becomes all the more obvious. Hermas, for example, draws together baptismal images from across the NT, unites them with his own triad of Ephesians-like “with” verbs,101 and develops it all into his own image of the church as a building that arises out of Baptism: (CC)

“So these also who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and ‘entered into the kingdom of God’ [Jn 3:5]. For before,” said he, “a man bears the name of the Son of God, he is dead. But when he receives the seal he puts away mortality and receives life. The seal, then, is the water. They go down then into the water dead, and come up alive. This seal, then, was preached to them also, and they made use of it ‘to enter into the kingdom of God.’ ” … “Through them [the apostles], therefore, they were made alive [ἐζωοποιήθησαν], and received the knowledge of the name of the Son of God. For this cause they also came up with [συνανέβησαν] them and were joined p 308 [συνηρμόσθησαν] into the building of the tower, and were used together with them for the building [συνῳκοδομήθησαν].”

In this Christian church, where that vivifying Gospel is proclaimed and applied with the water, Christians enter into paradise with Christ. (CC)

It is contrary to the context to refer as some do “hath quickened” to the future resurrection of the flesh, guaranteed in the resurrection of Christ. The apostle rather means an inner quickening which we have already experienced in ourselves, as ethical, spiritual quickening, translation from spiritual death into a new, spiritual life. As spiritual death consists in the complete lack of knowledge of God, fear, love and trust, in complete impotence with respect to the things concerning God and the soul’s salvation; so the new spiritual life, whereto God has quickened us, consists in this, that we now have contact with God, possess us, an organ for God and divine things, that we now rightly know God, fear Him from our hearts, love and trust Him. (Stoeckhardt)

Paul, however, does not simply write “hath quickened” but “hat quickened together with Christ.” God has quickened us with Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

Raising Christ from physical death signaled the completion of Christ’s saving work and sealed our redemption. It made possible our resurrection. It made possible our resurrection from spiritual death. (PBC)

When we could not lift a finger to help ourselves, God through Word and sacrament worked faith in our hearts, creating life where formerly there had been none. (PBC)

WHEN WE WERE DEAD - καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν—In the progressively inclusive movement of this pericope, Paul has referred to Gentile Christians as καὶ ὑμᾶς, “and *you*” (2:1), to Jewish Christians as καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες, “also *we* all” (2:3), and now draws the groups together with καὶ … ἡμᾶς, “even *us*” (2:5). This inclusive pronoun, encompassing the previous two direct objects, remains the direct object of the saving verbs through to the end of 2:6. On the interpretation of “dead in trespasses,” see the first textual note on 2:1, which has the identical phrase (νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν). The omission here of καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις, “and sins” (2:1), is not significant and is likely an abbreviation for rhetorical purposes. The participle is temporal and emphasizes our complete passivity in salvation: “*when* we were [still] dead,” God made us alive. (cc)

“Just as a dead body cannot raise itself to bodily, earthly life, so a person who by sin is spiritually dead cannot raise himself to spiritual life” (FC Ep. II 3). (TLSB)

1 Timothy 5:6 “But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED – χάριτί ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι—See the first textual note on 2:8, where Paul unfolds the meaning of this key clause, “by grace you have been saved.” If our analysis of the chiastic structure of the pericope is correct, this forms the exact midpoint, an emphatic position. Set apart by dashes in the NA27 text and in our translation, the phrase appears to be a doxological interjection (not a parenthesis) spurred by the remarkable proclamation that God has raised us from the dead with Christ. (As such it *might* be a preexisting liturgical acclamation quoted by Paul, especially since it abruptly shifts the person from “us” to “you.”) What could be more “by grace” than resurrection from the dead? And who could be more in need of rescue than those under control of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh? From all this you have been saved, Paul cries! (CC)

The textual variant that inserts οὗ before χάριτι makes the grace *Christ’s*: “Christ, by *whose* grace you have been saved.” Without this relative pronoun, one assumes it is the grace of God the Father, the one “rich in mercy” (2:4). The inclusion of so many versions and fathers in the list of witnesses attesting οὗ (D\* F G ar b vgcl syp; MVict Ambst Aug) suggests that an interpretative expansion has crept back into the Greek text. While the omission of the pronoun (NA27 text) makes the most sense in context, there can be no theological objection to thinking of Christ’s grace. (CC)

But there is more going on than apologetics. Paul would claim for us our place with Christ in heaven even if no opponent had suggested otherwise. It is the marvelous, divine answer to our sorry state of death, the action of “but God” (2:4) brought to bear on those who by definition could do nothing to help themselves. This is the nature of grace, which cannot be a response to anything in the one who receives or else it ceases to be grace. But salvation’s cause lay not just in an attitude of God; once God became man, it lay also in his new nature, as brought on by the incarnation itself. Our place is claimed for us in heaven, not merely because we have been incorporated baptismally into Christ, but because he first incorporated (enfleshed) himself with us by being born of the Virgin. What is said of Christ (1:20–21) is now said of us (2:5–6) precisely because we share his flesh (Heb 2:14–15, in a similar context). And what Christ experienced was only possible for him because he took on our flesh. Theodoret writes: (CC)

If Christ the Lord did not share our human nature, he would have been falsely called our firstfruits. If so his bodily nature was not raised from the dead and did not receive its seat at the right hand in heaven. And if none of this occurred how can it be said that God has raised us and seated us with Christ, that is, if we have nothing by nature that belongs to him?

Not all of Christ’s exaltation, however, is shared with every Christian. The line between Creator and creation remains unblurred. It is probably significant that Paul omits “at his [God’s] right hand” (1:20) when he applies Christ’s p 304 journey to all Christians (2:6). For this phrase describes not a literal place where we might exist with Christ, but an office of divine authority that is given to Christ alone. It is only with such a safeguard in place that we might speak of the *theosis* or “divinization” of the Christian, such as in the previously cited words of Irenaeus, that Christ, “on account of His great love, became what we are, so that He might bring us to be what He Himself is.” (CC)

To become what he is is to receive divine life and godly gifts, but not to become God. Neither is our share in his ascension to be understood as the bestowal on *our* human nature of his divine omnipotence, omnipresence, and so on, as confessed of Christ in the *genus maiestaticum*. To be seated in the heavenly places with Christ (2:6) means neither to be transferred bodily from one dwelling place to another nor to be given the sort of illocal omnipresence that the glorified Christ enjoys. But, as “at his [God’s] right hand” (1:20) indicates an authority, not a literal location, so the ascension of all Christians with Christ indicates not a preemptive exodus from this world but a spiritual exaltation, the conferral of divine honor on God’s children. Ultimately, what is so astonishing in this section of Ephesians is not the differences between the exaltation of Christ and Christian, but their remarkable likeness! (CC)

**2:6** GOD HAS RAISED US WITH CHRIST – καὶ συνήγειρεν—Aside from commonplace uses like “wake from sleep” and “lift up,” in the NT the simple verb ἐγείρω most frequently means “to raise from the dead.” p 289 The compound form συνήγειρεν, “he raised together with,” could, therefore, be a virtual synonym of συνεζωοποίησεν, “he made alive together with” (2:5), thus referring to resurrection from the dead (as in Col 2:12). On the other hand, the sequence of verbs and the clause that follows suggests “lift up” to heaven (ascension), as is implied in Col 3:1: “if then you have been *raised with* [συνηγέρθητε] Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” The two uses in Colossians (2:12; 3:1) in such close proximity suggest that for Paul συνεγείρω includes both ideas: “God *raised* and *lifted* us *up* together with and in Christ.” συνεγείρω, “to raise up with,” is thus subtly distinguished from the initial act of making alive. (CC)

Thus, for example, the Apostles’ Creed first confesses Christ’s descent into hell and then his resurrection from the dead (ἀναστάντα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν) on the third day, whereas Peter writes: “he was made alive by the Spirit [ζῳοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι], in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison” (1 Pet 3:18–19). The full sequence is this: made alive, descended to hell, rose from the dead. (CC)

SEATED US – καὶ συνεκάθισεν—The rare compound verb συγκαθίζω can simply mean “to sit down together” (intransitive), like Peter and company around the fire (Lk 22:55; 1 Esdras 9:6) or for a meal (Jer 16:8). The causative sense “to *make* sit together” appears only here in the Greek Bible. But the concept is expressed elsewhere with the simple verb καθίζω: “the one who conquers—I will cause him to sit with me [καθίσαι μετʼ ἐμοῦ] on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down [ἐκάθισα] with [μετά] my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:21). Sitting together with Christ (on his throne) is connected with victory over death; it is an act of glorification. As Paul applies to Christians what happened to Christ, he (deliberately?) omits the most focused expression of Christ’s divine authority: “at his [the Father’s] right hand” (said of Christ in Eph 1:20). While Christ promises to his apostles that they will sit on twelve thrones and judge Israel (Mt 19:28), there is no suggestion here that all of us are seated with Christ in order to participate actively in his acts of governing the cosmos or the church. Those who “reign with him [βασιλεύσουσιν μετʼ αὐτοῦ]” (Rev 20:6b) do so by sharing in the spoils of his triumph; they reign not over the cosmos but over death, for “over these the second death has no authority” (Rev 20:6a). (CC)

*heavenly realms.* See note on 1:3. (CSB)

Verses 6 and 7 emphasize how our union with Christ assures us of our place in heaven. Just as Christ has ascended to sit at the right hand of God the Father, so we can be confident that our place “in the heavenly realms” is secure. (LL)

ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—See the fourth textual note on 1:3 (and the fourth textual note on 1:20) for the distinctive Ephesian phrase “in the heavenlies.” The exaltation granted to the resurrected Christ is shared with all those who are baptized into him. The assertion that believers are already located in heaven is quite stunning but finds its meaning in the saints’ incorporation into Christ. While “in the heavenly places” is a *location*, it is not a place where Christ is confined as if to exclude him from the earth; the location symbolizes the full extent of his exalted, heavenly *power*, which transcends the universe. (CC)

So also the Christian now is not transferred to heaven as if removed from earth (physically), but granted a proleptic share in heavenly blessings (1:3). (Cf. Phil 3:20: “our citizenship is in heaven”; Heb 12:23: “enrolled in heaven.”) These do not belong to believers by nature, but are theirs insofar as they remain “in Christ.” “With Christ” or “in Christ” is expressed four times in the Gospel part of this unit (2:4–10). Because of our incorporation into Christ through Baptism, where he goes, we go. And when he comes again in victory, his victory will be ours (cf. 2 Tim 4:18), as Paul’s next clause shows (Eph 2:7). The present section of Ephesians expresses the paradoxical nature of Christian existence in both spatial and temporal terms: just as the baptized live simultaneously in the present *age* and the age to come, so they live simultaneously in this *world* and in the one above. (CC)

*in Christ Jesus.* Through our union with Christ. (CSB)

This union with Christ, already providing a foretaste of our reward, displays the riches of God’s love. Christ is often called the first fruits of the resurrection. Here appears as the first fruits of the ascension. The grace of God doesn’t just save us from hell – it delivers us to heaven. (LL)

**2:7** *coming ages.* Cf. 1:21; probably refers to the future of eternal blessing with Christ. (CSB)

ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις—The verb ἐνδείκνυμι, “to show,” can have a juridical sense, “to prove, give evidence.” (Rom 2:15; 9:17, 22; 2 Cor 8:24; 1 Tim 1:16) The future, eschatological consummation of these proleptic gifts of life will testify to the Lord’s grace—vindicating God and his promises. But the demonstration is chiefly for our benefit. Although Paul has expressed our salvation in the perfect tense (σεσῳσμένοι, “have been saved,” 2:5, 8; a completed event with ongoing consequences), there is always more. The fullness of salvation is yet to come in the age inaugurated by Christ’s reappearance on the Last Day. Although “the coming ages” (plural) is a unique expression in the NT, the phrase should not be distinguished from similar singular phrases that mean “the age to come” (e.g., Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; Heb 6:5; see the third textual note on 1:21). This is not a reference to hostile spiritual forces (“Aeons”) or hostile earthly forces in subsequent eras of earthly history.42 Future “ages” (plural) are commonly expressed in doxological eternity formulae (e.g., Rom 1:25: “forever”); the word is a sort of plural of majesty, emphasizing the ongoing succession of time in eternity. It is in that heavenly era that all hidden things will be revealed (Col 3:3–4), faith giving way to sight as the saints gather around the glorious, visible presence of Christ on the throne of the Almighty. (CC)

*show.* Or “exhibit” or “prove.” (CSB)

Imagine how at the turn of the century immigrant families sent one of their own on to America. Sometimes months later they would hear that their loved one had arrived and was doing everything possible for the rest of the family to follow. That loved one’s presence in the new country left those in the old country already sensing the blessings that were to be theirs. That is the dynamic at work here. Christ is in heaven, victorious after the living, dying, and rising. As sure as he is there and has done all that is necessary for us, we will follow. His grace, his love, in going before us, has made it possible. (LL)

God did not make us alive just to give us a small taste of heaven. He did so, “in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (PBC)

INCOMPARABLE – The incomparable ( *huperballon*) riches are so great that they surpass any hyperbole. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

There is nothing in our present range of experience that can compare with heaven, so great is the love and mercy of our God, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (PBC)

EXPRESSED IN HIS KINDNESS TO US – ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφʼ ἡμᾶς—In the LXX χρηστότης, “kindness,” sometimes translates טוֹב, the “goodness” of God, particularly in working salvation (e.g., LXX Pss 24:7 [MT/ET 25:7]; 30:20 [MT 31:20; ET 31:19]). Frequently in the NT it is a reflected quality in God’s children, worked by the Holy Spirit. But here it is God’s saving goodness, voiced in succession to “mercy” (Eph 2:4) and “grace” (2:5, 7) in overwhelming proclamation of God’s generosity toward his fallen creatures (cf. Titus 3:4–5, where it is placed in parallel to φιλανθρωπία, “love for man”). (CC)

IN CHRIST JESUS – p 291 ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—See the fifth textual note on 1:3. This is the third repetition of “with Christ” or “in Christ” (2:5, 6, 7) in the second part of this pericope, and the Greek here (as in 2:6) is repeated verbatim in 2:10 (“in Christ Jesus”). (CC)

**2:8-9** “And this ( *touto*) not from yourselves.” *Touto* is neuter, referring back to the concept “saved,” not to “grace” or “faith” which are feminine. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

**2:8** A major passage for understanding God’s grace, i.e., his kindness, unmerited favor and forgiving love.

IT IS BY GRACE – It is utter generosity, unselfish, spontaneous, recklessly prodigal generosity, which acts wholly out of loving concern for the other’s need, even if he is completely unworthy of the love and help thus offered him.

ῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι—The definite article τῇ, which seems to distinguish this statement from its earlier anarthrous occurrence (2:5), may simply be included because of the postpositive conjunction γάρ, “for” (which cannot stand first in the sentence). With or without an expressed article, χάρις, “grace,” is a definite noun. The article τῇ is also resumptive: *the* grace previously mentioned and described in 2:4–7, “by *this* grace you have been saved.” On χάρις, see the first textual note on 1:2 and the second textual note on 1:6. Its position at the beginning of this new sentence is emphatic. The dative χάριτι, “*by* grace,” is of means or instrument, stressing God’s gracious, favorable attitude toward us in Christ as the efficient cause of salvation. (CC)

The participle σεσῳσμένοι, “having been saved,” is perfect tense, denoting a past action with present consequences. The use of a past tense verb meaning “saved” is unusual for Paul. He typically distinguishes “justification” (δικαιόω, δικαιοσύνη) as a present act through the means of grace from “salvation” (σῴζω, σωτηρία) as a *future* deliverance from God’s wrath on the Day of Judgment (Rom 3:24; 5:9; 10:9–10, 13; 13:11; Phil 2:12; 1 Thess 5:9; cf. Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32); Mt 10:22; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5). But sometimes he expresses the great mystery that salvation has *already* occurred for us, even if we do not yet see it, for “in hope we *were* saved” (ἐσώθημεν, aorist tense, Rom 8:24). (f. Rom 11:11; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 2:11; 3:5) It is brought forward as a present and ongoing reality: “behold, *now* is the favorable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). This is the perspective expressed in the current verse, emphasized by the perfect passive participle σεσῳσμένοι: “you are already now in the state of having been saved.” It is a state akin to (and including) the Ephesians’ present resurrection and ascension (2:5–6): it is experienced now proleptically and in part, with the fullness to be confirmed without remainder at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s emphasis on the *present* reality of salvation may be explained by the Ephesian context of battle with hostile spiritual forces (cf. 6:10–17): as *Christ* has already risen above them in triumph (1:20–23), so also he has raised *us* above them in triumph (2:5–8); therefore we need not fear them, even in this present life. (CC)

Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 147: “Salvation is thus described as deliverance from the power and influence of the cosmic ‘powers.’ ” (CC)

*you have been saved.*† “Saved” has a wide range of meanings. It includes salvation from God’s wrath, which we all had incurred by original sin and our own sins. The tense of the verb (also in v. 5) suggests a completed action with emphasis on its present effect. (CSB)

*through faith.*† See Ro 3:21–31 (and notes on that passage), which establishes the necessity of faith in Christ as the only way of being made right with God. (CSB)

p 292 διὰ πίστεως—There is nothing in context to suggest that “through faith” might be the “faithfulness” of Christ; it is *fides qua creditur*, subjective faith. The preposition διά subtly distinguishes the role of the Christian’s faith from God’s grace. While grace is the efficient cause, faith is merely the receiving instrument of the gift of salvation. Although Paul can vary his use of prepositions, it is important to maintain this distinction: “*by* grace” (2:5, 8), “*through* faith” (2:8). The two are inseparable; man’s faith (not works) is the necessary correlative of God’s grace: διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ πίστεως, ἵνα κατὰ χάριν, “for this reason it is from faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom 4:16). The threefold definition of justification given in the Augsburg Confession provides normative language rooted in Ephesians 2 and Romans 3–5: (CC)

Likewise, they [Lutherans] teach that men are not able to be justified before God by their own strengths, merits, or works, but are justified freely [*gratis*, “by grace”], on account of Christ [*propter Christum*], through faith [*per fidem*], when they believe that they are received into grace and their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who made satisfaction for our sins by his death. (AC 4 [my translation])

Like “grace,” “faith” is the very opposite of works (Rom 4:4–5). “Faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy” (Ap 4:56 [*Triglotta*, 137]). Faith excludes the works of man, but embraces the works of God. Baptism does not stand in opposition to faith, but is the powerful working of God by which he gives new life as a gift to be received through faith (Col 2:12). In this sense we may also understand the words of our Lord to the woman whose sins he had just forgiven, “your faith *has saved* you” (σέσωκεν, perfect tense, Lk 7:50); by faith she is already in a saved condition, but the Lord has done the saving. (CC)

*not from yourselves.* No human effort can contribute to our salvation; it is the gift of God. (CSB)

καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν—“And this is not from yourselves”: some have referred the neuter pronoun τοῦτο, “this,” to faith. Chrysostom, for example: “Even faith, he says, is not from us. For if the Lord had not come, if he had not called us, how should we have been able to believe? *For how*, he says, *shall they believe if they have not heard?* [Rom 10:14.] So even the act of faith is not self-initiated. It is, he says, *the gift of God*” p 293 [Eph 2:8]. Doubtless correct theologically, this is grammatically unlikely since πίστις is feminine. The neuter τοῦτο must refer to the immediately preceding clause, “for by grace you have been saved through faith” (2:8a); faith, of course, is included. This way of salvation does not proceed from any cause, act, or worthiness in man, who is the object of salvation. After all, what does a “dead” man (2:1, 5) have to contribute to his own rescue or resuscitation? (CC)

Corpses don’t resuscitate themselves! Our rescue, our life, comes as a gift from God. (LL)

The Greek literally says, “not from you.” – “You have not done this of your own strength.” (Brauer)

John 3:16 ““For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,﻿f﻿ that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Romans 3:24 “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in﻿a﻿ Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:32 “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

GIFT OF GOD – θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον—For emphasis θεοῦ is placed first: literally, “*of God* is the gift.” (In contrast, in the preceding clause ὑμῶν, “yourselves,” was placed last.) The connection of “grace” with the language of “gift” (here δῶρον) is a frequent and intimate pairing in the NT. For example, in Rom 3:24, “being justified freely [δωρεάν, ‘by way of gift’] by means of his grace [τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι] through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” is set in a pericope in which “faith” is hammered home eight times (Rom 3:21–31). The present pericope is encapsulated well in the theme verse of Romans 5: “for if by the trespass of the one man all died, how much more did the grace of God and the gift in/by the grace [ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι] of the one man Jesus Christ overflow to the many” (Rom 5:15). (CC)

**2:9** *not by works.*† One cannot earn salvation by “observing the law” (Ro 3:20, 28). Such a legalistic approach to salvation is consistently condemned in Scripture. (CSB)

οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων—With “not from works,” Paul restates and explains what he means by οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, “not from yourselves” (2:8). He unequivocally opposes grace and works: “if by grace, no longer from works, since grace would then no longer be grace” (Rom 11:6). (Cf. Rom 3:27; 9:16; 10:3; Phil 3:9; 2 Tim 1:9) Some proponents of the so-called New Perspective on Paul have interpreted ἔργων νόμου, “works of the Law” (e.g., Gal 2:16), restrictively as only those ceremonial requirements that distinguished Jews from Gentiles (Sabbath, circumcision, etc.) and by which Jews pridefully exalted themselves (Rom 2:17) and Judaizers oppressed the consciences of Gentiles (Gal 2:14; Col 2:11, 16–17). Whether ἔργων νόμου refers only to these distinguishing marks is highly debatable. In the absence of νόμος, “Law,” in our present verse, it would certainly be inappropriate to restrict Paul’s meaning here. In fact, the present verse presents a major obstacle to the view that Paul is opposed only to works of the Law that set apart Jews from Gentiles. We might p 294 paraphrase with “not from any sort of works”—though, of course, the works God does are not excluded (cf. 2:10)! (CC)

Luther notes: (CC)

However, it is often objected, “If Baptism is itself a work, and you say that works are of no use for salvation, what becomes of faith?” To this you may answer: Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God’s (for, as was said, you must distinguish Christ’s Baptism quite clearly from a bath-keeper’s baptism). God’s works, however, are salutary and necessary for salvation, and they do not exclude but rather demand faith, for without faith they could not be grasped.…

and they do not exclude but rather demand faith, for without faith they could not be grasped.…

Thus you see plainly that Baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps. (LC 4:35, 37) (CC)

The only way good works could save us with a perfect and just God is if our whole life were perfect. God cannot accept a 99 percent morally perfect life. He requires 100 percent perfection. (LL)

The New English Bible translates it “not a reward for work done.”

*no one can boast.* No one can take credit for his or her salvation. (CSB)

The idea behind the Greek is an attitude of self-congratulation and pride.

Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,﻿f﻿ that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in﻿a﻿ Christ Jesus our Lord.”

SO THAT NO ONE CAN BOAST – ἵνα μή τις καυχήσηται—Just as “works” are excluded from salvation if they are “of men” but included if they are “of God” (see the previous textual note), so also the moral quality of καυχάομαι, “to boast, take pride in,” depends on “in whom” one boasts. To boast “in God” (Rom 5:11), “in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2), “in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:3), and “in the cross” (Gal 6:14) is to place confidence where it belongs. To boast “in sufferings” (Rom 5:3) or “in my weaknesses” (2 Cor 12:9) is an ironical way of boasting in Christ instead of one’s own strength. For to boast in oneself or one’s works, “in men” (1 Cor 3:21), “in your flesh” (Gal 6:13), or simply “to boast” (1 Cor 1:29) is contrary to the passive way of salvation; it is the opposite of “grace” (Eph 2:5, 7–8) and “gift” (Rom 4:2–4), and must be excluded (Rom 3:27). “What do you have that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7). Because of the significant role of honor/shame in Greco-Roman culture, boasting pops up frequently in Paul’s verbal interaction with that culture. But he redirects its focus: “let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31). God excludes all contributing human works from salvation so that our trust would be placed in the only One who is completely reliable and worthy of glory. (CC)

**2:10** *workmanship.* The Greek for this word sometimes has the connotation of a “work of art.” (CSB)

αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα—Here Paul inverts the categorical statement “not from works” (2:9) as if to say, “well, not from *our* works.” He stresses the contrast by placing the pronoun αὐτοῦ, “his [God’s],” in emphatic first position. In the LXX ποίημα may refer to a “deed” done by men (Ecclesiastes passim), either good (1 Sam 19:4) or bad (Ezra 9:13). But more frequently it is used of God’s “deeds” of judgment and redemption (LXX Pss 63:10 [MT 64:10; ET 64:9]; 91:5 [MT 92:5; ET 92:4]; 142:5 [MT/ET 143:5]). God stands over against creation as the potter to the clay (ποίημα, “the thing made,” Is 29:16). His working makes us into something new. The noun ποίημα is derived from the verb ποιέω, “to do, make,” which is certainly used of God’s creation in the LXX (even *ex nihilo*, e.g., Gen 1:1, 7, 16); but ποιέω sometimes distinguishes itself from κτίζω, “to create,” by an emphasis on working with a material (cf. LXX Gen 1:26–27 with ποιέω and the forming of Adam from the earth in Gen 2:7). God takes us fallen creatures and remakes us, restoring his image in us. Since nouns ending with -μα normally refer to the *result* of an action, the noun ποίημα (“what is made”) is what comes from doing ποιέω (“make”). Thus, the use of the noun in Eph 2:10 is appropriate to highlight the completion of God’s gracious, saving, re-creating work upon us. p 295 This is reemphasized by the subsequent *aorist* participle κτισθέντες, “created” (see the next textual note), referring back to Baptism as a causal action that took place prior to the main verb ἐσμεν, “we are.” We are what we are because God made us so. (CC)

This is not to exclude God’s continual, powerful working in us, preserving us and leading us to the day of our redemption (2 Cor 4:12, 16; Phil 1:6; Eph 1:19; 3:20; 1 Thess 2:13). (CC)

“Workmanship” ( *poiēma*) is that which is made or fashioned. While the verb *poieō*, “make,” is used in the LXX of Gen 1, *passim*, the next word in our text, *ktizō*, “create,” is used more frequently in the New Testament to denote God creating out of nothing (e.g., Mark 16:15; Rom 1:20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The Greek word for “workman” is poiema, the same word from which we get our word “poem.” God continues to work in each of us in order to make us what he wants of us – and what God creates is always a thing of beauty! (LL)

poyaymah – To be the product of someone who has very lovingly crafted something. We say that a craftsman communicates with his work so God continues to do so with us.

CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS – κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—With “created” (κτισθέντες), the language of new creation is now made explicit. What was dead is made alive, just as God took clay and created a man, breathing life into it (Gen 2:7). In Holy Baptism the old man is put to death and a new man is created (cf. Eph 4:22–24). This is the fourth instance of “with/in Christ” in the pericope. As all mankind were present in Adam’s creation (and fall), so the new creation embraces and benefits all those who are “in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). (CC)

Mark 16:15 “He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Romans 1:20 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Galatians 6:15 “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.”

TO DO GOOD WORKS – God has much work for us to do. Good works are a crucial aspect of the Christian life. Our good works, however, become an expression of thankfulness for all Christ has done for us, not an attempt to win heaven. (LL)

ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς—The traditional translation “*for* good works” needs scrutiny. The preposition ἐπί plus the dative normally introduces the basis of an action, the opposite of the translation “for”: e.g., “live *on* bread” (Mt 4:4); “*by* faith in his name” (Acts 3:16); “righteousness of God *on the basis of* faith” (Phil 3:9); “my flesh will dwell *on the basis of* hope” (Acts 2:26). Authorization “upon the name of” is related (Mt 18:5; Acts 4:18; etc.). Purpose, goal, or result can be expressed with ἐπί plus the accusative (e.g., Mt 3:7; Lk 4:43), but the expected preposition is πρός or εἰς, as in εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἡτοιμασμένον, “prepared *for* every good work” (2 Tim 2:21; see also πρός in Titus 3:1). If the more common meaning of ἐπί plus the dative were to be maintained here without contradicting everything Paul has just said about the role of works, it has been suggested that Paul has *Christ’s* works in mind: “created in Christ Jesus *on the basis of* [Christ’s] good works.” The contrast is then with *our* works (“not from works,” 2:9). Unfortunately, there is no hint in the context that Christ’s works are in mind, nor is his work of salvation ever called a “good work” in the NT (Phil 1:6 being a possible exception). (CC)

It is more likely that Paul means to draw a contrast with the evil works in which we walked prior to Christ (2:1–3). BDAG cites three other instances of ἐπί plus the dative with the meaning “for [result, purpose]” (Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 4:7; 2 Tim 2:14); though debatable, they confirm the possibility of this meaning. Wis of Sol 2:23 is persuasive, and extrabiblical evidence is extensive. (CC)

p 296 If, then, we accept the traditional translation, “*for* good works,” Paul’s point is nevertheless *not* to identify good works as the ultimate goal of salvation by grace. In the present context his purpose is to put good works in their proper place: it is not “*from* works” (2:9) but “*for* works” (2:10). Good works are not the *purpose* of salvation, but they are its *result*. The new creation worked in Christ restores the original positive function of the Law by providing a God-pleasing way for the Christian to live. The order of things is best expressed by Luther: “[First] that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and [second] serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” (CC)

“To do good works” ( *epi ergois agathois*). The connection denoted by *epi* is not motivational but descriptive: just as the sun was created as that which shines, so we have been vivified-raised-enthroned with Christ as those who do good works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

All of man’s work is God’s work through man. It embraces the whole conduct of a man in so far as he falls under the antithesis of good and evil.. and including the hidden motions of the will, whether in relation to God, to the world or to other men. (Kittel) –

With our new God-given spiritual life we are indeed able to respond to God’s will. We are able, albeit imperfectly, to do what God wants. It is not that we have to, but rather that we want to do God’s will. The good works that flow form faith are simply an opportunity to show our appreciation for all that God in Christ has done for us. It would be hard to improve on the apostle John’s terse analysis: “We love (God) because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). But even the good deeds we do are not basis for boasting. They are really not our own doing; we’re simply being given the opportunity to do the good things “which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (PBC)

Good is agathos and means to do something that is of benefit to others. Works comes from ergon which means an act of labor. The sun has its purpose and so do we. What we are to do is connected to the gifts/talents and opportunities God gives us. Our walk in Christ is a walk in good works (little Christs).

Matthew 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

2 Corinthians 5:15 “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

Galatians 5:16 “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Ephesians 5:2 “and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

*prepared in advance.*† Carries forward the theme of God’s purpose and planning, seen in ch. 1. (CSB)

οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν—The case of οἷς, “which,” is dative by attraction to its dative antecedent, ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς (“good works”). Strictly speaking the relative pronoun should be accusative (οὕς) as the direct object of the verb προητοίμασεν: “which [works] God prepared beforehand.” The compound verb προετοιμάζω, “to prepare beforehand,” is rare in the NT (only here and in Rom 9:23), though the simple verb ἑτοιμάζω is common and refers frequently to the work of God in preparing eternal gifts for his children (Mt 20:23; 22:4; 25:34; Jn 14:2–3; 1 Cor 2:9; Heb 11:16). Our relationship with God is so unequivocally based on his monergism that the very good works we do are prepared by him beforehand (which coheres with the predestination language of Eph 1:4–5, 11–12). *He places us into them.* Even here we can lay no claim. This is chiefly because they are works of Christ in and through us; as we are in him, we do the good works that he does. Our good works are Christ’s good works (Phil 1:6; 2:13). (CC

That “in them we should walk” forms an *inclusio* with the opening lines of the pericope (2:1–2, with περιεπατήσατε, “you walked,” in 2:2). This is how we are transformed: from dead men walking in trespasses and sins (2:1, 5) into living, newly created children of God who walk in good works. If in Baptism we have put off the old man “with his works” and “put on the new” (Col 3:9–10; cf. Eph 4:22–24), then with the new man we have received new works. This passage is thoroughly abused if it is used to *coerce* Christians into doing “good works,” for the power to do them lies not in us (Rom 7:18–25; 2 Cor 3:5), and works striven for may cease to be good (Mt 25:37–40). Rather, Paul wishes us to rejoice that God is pleased to do good works in us, and he directs all praise for those works to God. (CC)

All the ways of holiness and righteousness are God’s design and preparation. We need not puzzle about and search for what may please God, he has long ago mapped out the entire course. They all spring from faith. (Lenski)

“Which God prepared in advance for us to do.” In *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961, p 427), Lenski writes, “All the ways of holiness and righteousness are God’s design and preparation. We need not puzzle about and search for what may please God, he has long ago mapped out the entire course. What Paul says is not that God prepared us that we should walk in good works (so Luther), but that he prepared the good works.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

1 Corinthians 12:11 “All these (gifts) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

2 Timothy 1:9 “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

GOSPEL

John 3:14-21

**14﻿ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ﻿15﻿ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.﻿16﻿ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ﻿17﻿ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ﻿18﻿ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.19﻿ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ﻿20﻿ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ﻿21﻿ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”**

**3:13-15** The Son of Man, the royal king who receives heaven’s glory from the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14, is to be “exalted and lifted up” (Is 52:13–53:12), but on a cross! This event was typified by Moses’ bronze serpent and its healing effects (Num 21:4–9). “Must,” as in v 7, states that this is God’s Gospel way of salvation, and there is no other. Note the frequency (and importance) of the verb “believe” in the text: 3:12,15,16,18. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

**3:13** *the Son of Man.* Jesus’ favorite self-designation (see notes on Mk 8:31; Lk 6:5; 19:10). (CSB)

Luther: “[Jesus] calls Himself the Son of Man who has His existence both on earth and in heaven [simultaneously]” (AE 22:321). (TLSB)

In the next two verses, Jesus emphasizes a vertical understanding of *anōthen* in two different contexts. He first professes that he is “from above,” since he “descended from heaven.” Yet in the divine economy of the Trinity, the Son is in constant ascension to his Father while, as the Word made flesh, his prayers continually ascend on high. This verse may then remind the Gospel’s reader of Jesus’ earlier words to Nathanael, “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Since Nicodemus has already praised Jesus for the God-given signs he does (v 2), the Lord appears to be urging him to “connect the dots” and realize that as these signs have their source from above, so also the birth of which he speaks comes from above. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Jesus had the knowledge and authority to tell Nicodemus of heavenly things because He alone came from heaven. He was the Word, who was with God when the plan of salvation was determined. And He had become a perfect human being, the Son of Man, to execute the plan. (PBC)

The first example of heavenly things is found in verse 13. The second example begins in verse 14. Among human beings there is only one human who is heavenly and that is Jesus. (Buls)

"The One who is in heaven" is a variant reading, not found in all the manuscripts. Lutheran exegetes are unanimous in including the words. Lutherans say: "The amazing thing is that the incarnate Christ is in heaven also according to His human nature." The Reformed say: "His divine nature is in heaven, but only His human nature can be on earth in the state of humiliation." Lutherans insist that in the state of exaltation Jesus' human nature is everywhere. The Reformed deny this. We are dealing with a fundamental difference in theology here. Of our translations, only KJV and NKJV include these words. (Buls)

For two reasons we must include these words: (Buls)

1. A difficult reading would hardly have been added;
2. The diversity of variant readings shows an attempt to clarify these fathomless words.

While Jesus was on earth He could say: "I came from heaven and am in heaven." (Buls)

**3:14-21** Jesus is sharing these words with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night, most likely for fear of being seen talking with the one he calls “Rabbi.” He recognizes that Jesus is the one who has come from God because of the miraculous signs he is doing. Jesus shares with Nicodemus that he must be born again through water and the Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

It is often observed that John’s description of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is a kind of theology in a circle—a coming down, followed by an upward return to the Father. Raymond Brown makes the fascinating observation that there are three statements concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man in John’s Gospel and that these correspond to the three Passion predictions in the Synoptics. Further, says Brown, “‘being lifted up’ refers to one continuous action of ascent” that embraces the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension (The Gospel According to John [Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1966], 146). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

The text (especially v 16) is so well-known that we tend to forget the immediate context. Jesus is in dialogue with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a well-intentioned but theologically inadequate seeker for whom the love of God must have been an astonishing surprise. Max Lucado (He Still Moves Stones [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993], 126–32) does a masterful job capturing the impact the Gospel of God’s love must have made on this legalist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:14-15** Refers to the Old Testament Reading from Num 21:4–9. Throughout the Gospels, “lifted up” is used as a metaphor for crucifixion. It does not mean “lifted up in praise,” as is often thought in our day. Our praise is not what draws persons to Christ. It is his perfect sacrifice for our sins. Our response is then praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

While most translations begin a new sentence, the *kai* at the beginning certainly allows us to treat vv 13–15 as one complete thought: the Son of Man came down from heaven in order to be lifted up above the heads of sinful men and thereby to bring salvation to mankind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Again, human effort is completely discounted. The bronze serpent sat in Israel’s encampment for all to see. No one cured himself of his snakebite; God effected the cure. So also, when we look upon the One who was pierced (cf. Jn 19:37), who has now ascended into heaven, we are healed of sin-sickness and eternal death. By “looking to Jesus” (Heb 12:2), we are blessed with eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

From the heavenly point of view, the deliverance from snakes in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9) was not merely for the benefit of the people at that time. As wonderful as the miracle was for the individual people who recovered from snakebites, it was also a miracle that kept the people of Israel alive. Since that was the nation from which Jesus would be born, the salvation of the world depended on Israel staying alive. In addition, it has become a lasting picture of God’s deliverance for all people from the serpent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:14** JUST AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SNAKE IN THE DESERT – Jesus draws a comparison between the lifted up bronze serpent and the lifted up Son of Man. This comparison is developed throughout the pericope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

In Num 21:4–9, the Israelites complained about their redemption from Egypt and the “miserable food” God supplied them from heaven. (Similarly, in Jn 6:25–71 many complained when the redeeming Christ said he would feed them with the real food of his body and blood, given for the life of the world.) God sent deadly serpents which bit the children of Israel, and many died (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). This was a physical manifestation of the old spiritual plague brought by Satan, “that ancient serpent” (Rev 20:2). The serpents brought death by biting their victims and injecting poison. Even so, the serpentine devil brought death to Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, by deceiving them and injecting the poison of original sin (Genesis 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

According to God’s command and promise, however, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Note the play on the similar Hebrew words *nechash-nǝchushet* “snake of bronze” in Num 21: 9, leading to its name *nǝchushtan* “Nehushtan” in 2 Kings 18:4 (which says the serpent was preserved and revered as a “holy relic” until godly King Hezekiah ended the idolatry about 800 years later). All those who were bitten and looked up at it lived. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifted-up serpent looked like a deadly serpent, but was without poison. The lifted-up Son of Man looked like a sinner, but was only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he was crucified as a criminal, but was without sin (Is 53:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross (Col 2:15 NIV, KJV; cf. RSV footnote). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

God made the elevated bronze serpent the source of life (Num 21:8). The elevated Son of Man is God’s source of eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Whoever looked up to the bronze snake was healed. They did not need to do any good works first, only behold the “savior” God provided, and God fulfilled his objective promise. Likewise, “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (Jn 6:40). No good works are necessary first (Epistle Lesson). God fulfills his objective promise in Christ without any merit on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

All who looked to the serpent were healed. God’s promise was for the entire people. Similarly, but in a greater way, God’s salvation in Christ is for the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike. Note the emphatic cal “all” in Num 21:8 (NIV: “anyone”), and pas, “all,” in Jn 3:15, 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifting up of the Son refers not only to his crucifixion, but also to his resurrection and exaltation to glory in heaven. The verb hupsoō, “lift up,” is also in the “exalted” of Phil 2:9. Jesus speaks of the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his glorification in John 17. cf. anabebēken, “gone up,” in Jn 3:13, which suggests that the lifting up of Christ on the cross is also his exaltation back to heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

To help Nicodemus link Christ with the Scripture he already knew. It also point to the fact that there is only way to be saved. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the flowing ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Some versions begin a new section at this point, others that a new section begins at verse 16. In either case they attribute these words (from here to verse 21) to the Evangelist John. But we note that Jesus is still speaking in verses 16 and 17. (Buls)

Jesus is explaining. Verse 12 denotes what is observable: the results of regeneration. Verse 13 denotes what is not observable: the eternal counsel of God for man and the marvel of the person of the incarnate Christ. Verse 14 introduces the second unobservable truth: The salvation of mankind. Verses 15 to 21 are like the opening of the flower with beautiful petals. Jesus moves from the unobservable to the observable in verse 21, the good works of a Christian. In other words, Jesus is the speaker to the end of verse 21. (Buls)

Back to verse 14. (Buls)

Kretzmann: There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptile after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal. Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross. And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Buls)

"Must be" is impersonal and does not denote compulsion or fate. The necessity is caused by the will of God and the dire and awful condition of mankind. (Buls)

"Lifted up" are correlative adverbs of manner, indicating a precise comparison. What they have in common is the verb "lift." The Old Testament account is found at Numbers 21:8ff. This verse reminds us immediately of John 12:32-34 where the same verb is found. (Buls)

Bengel: Where there was no other remedy. (Buls)

True. What he is implying is that there is no remedy except in the uplifted Son of man. The impersonal verb does not denote compulsion or fate but the necessary willing obedience of the Son of man. For it was for this purpose that He became incarnate. Lenski insists that the point of comparison should not be pressed beyond the idea of "being lifted up." After due consideration we prefer the interpretation of Kretzmann: (Buls)

The act of Moses in the wilderness, in erecting the brazen serpent before the eyes of the stricken people, was typical, symbolical, Numbers 21: 1-9. . . Jesus is the antitype of the brazen serpent. . . There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. 1) The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptiles after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal; 2) Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross; 3) And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, shall not be punished with everlasting destruction, but have eternal life. (Buls)

Hendriksen has a good exposition of type and anti type at this point, but ruins it completely when he adds:

Though Christ is lifted up in the sight of all, he does not save all. (Buls)

He believes in a limited atonement and his interpretations are very often synergistic. More on this later. (Buls)

Lenski: The Book of Wisdom 16:6 calls this serpent the symbol of salvation, and in church decorations it is constantly used to picture Jesus. (Buls)

*the Son of Man must be lifted up.* See notes on 12:31–32. (CSB)

“Lifted up” (*hupsōsen*) is an obvious reference to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21. It may also suggest the glorification of the Suffering Servant in Is 52:13: “He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.” Later in John’s Gospel (12:32–33), Jesus uses this word to signal the kind of death he was to die. And the same word is used again in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 as a reference to the ascension of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:15-16** Jesus makes clear that salvation is a gift, for the Son of God is himself a gift that God gave. No restrictions are placed upon the recipients, for “whoever believes” lives. The Son of God come down at Christmas finally fulfilled his mission on Good Friday. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Luther here emphasizes the personal union in Christ. He notes that while earlier Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he now shows that “God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death” (LW 22:351). It is not a mere man who saves us, nor is it God exercising his unbridled power. Instead, the God-man Jesus Christ conquers through surrender and saves his people from sin, death, and devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:15** EVERYONE – All the "that" clauses in this section (15,16,17,20,21) denote purpose. In this instance the word "that" hangs on "eternal life." By the way, the passive infinitive denotes what was done to Jesus, what He suffered on the cross. There is no such thing as faith in Christ unless it be in the crucified Christ. Compare Galatians 2:20. The Son of God loved me by giving Himself in my stead. That is the only way in which the love of God is revealed to us. (Buls)

That word "everyone" does not denote limitation but open invitation. Just as the serpent was lifted up for all on the occasion, so Jesus was lifted up for all. Furthermore, "who believes" does not mean that man must do something first to make the atonement an actuality but rather that God Himself causes the hearers to believe in what has already been done for all. (Buls)

*believes.* See note on 1:7. (CSB)

That is the whole point of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in verses 1-10. Faith in Christ is always the God-given modus of salvation, not the man-generated causa of salvation. (Buls)

Note that both participle and verb, are in the present tense. Being in possession of life eternal is a present reality for the believer. For him there is no such thing as judgment. (Buls)

The promise belongs to everyone who believes. It is universal. No one who believes is excluded. At the same time the promise belongs to each one who believes. It is personal. God knows our names, and each of us has eternal life. (PBC)

*eternal life.* An infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God—both now and forever. (CSB)

Bengel: The cross is the ladder to heaven. Eternal death, because of the poison of sin. Eternal life, by regeneration and faith. This mention of eternal life is made at the earliest opportunity in each instance in the discourses of the Savior, and occurs in this passage first (in the Gospel of John). (Buls)

Note that Bengel considered the words "should not perish" textual. They are found in the Koine text and therefore in KJV and NKJV. This difference should not be passed over lightly. By the way, the term "everlasting life" occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John and six times in 1 John. (Buls)

The dying Israelites who looked at the bronze serpent lived. Now everyone who looks in faith at the Son of Man will live forever. The typology and the textual variants support taking the words “in him” with “believes,” not “have,” though both make sense. Echēi, “have,” is present subjunctive, indicating that the believer has eternal life both now, in the midst of deadly snakes, and forever in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:1–15** Nicodemus, though “the teacher of Israel,” shows that he cannot comprehend the Spirit’s miraculous work of new birth through Baptism. Human reason, darkened by sin, cannot accept that God can grant spiritual rebirth through ordinary water used with His Word. But such a great promise has come from none other than the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for our salvation! • O Holy Spirit, I praise You that You have given me new birth to a living hope through Christ’s resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

**3:16-17** V 16 is referred to by many Christians as the Gospel in a nutshell. Since Baptism is a Means of Grace that conveys the gifts of the Gospel, and since the water of Baptism is sometimes administered by way of a scallop shell, Baptism might be referred to as the Gospel in a scallop shell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:16** *God so loved the world.* The great truth that motivated God’s plan of salvation (cf. 1Jn 4:9–10). (CSB)

Very likely the best known verse in the Bible. Verses 16-18 explain verses 14-15.(Buls)

"World" is the Greek word "kosmos." It must denote all human beings. Not just people who have been chosen, or "elected" to believe. (Buls)

"So that" denotes actual result. (Buls)

"One and only" is translated in KJV, NASB, AAT and NKJV as "only-begotten." Others translate it "only" in the sense of unique. The Nicene Creed and our Lutheran fathers understood this word in the sense of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Buls)

The verse clearly shows that Jesus is God's gift to all human beings of all time. (Buls)

The love referred to is the aorist of agape; the “one and only” notes a uniqueness, only one of its kind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Greek agapao, used repeatedly in John; God’s sacrificial and faithful love for the entire world alienated from God, that is, all humankind. (TLSB)

God values, cherishes, and esteems mankind on the basis of God’s own being; from eternity he is love (1 In 4:8). He loved the whole world, all people (vv 17–18 preclude a limited love or atonement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible. In verse 14 "so" meant "thus" in the sense of "in the same way." But here in verse 16 it means "to such an extent." "For" is an explanatory particle, used here to elucidate verses 14-15 further. This example is the clearest in the New Testament as to what God's love means. It does not say that God "liked" the world. He did not. But He loved the whole world in all its misery and sin, loved it to redeem it. (Buls)

"The world" must mean the entire world of people. The Reformed limit it to the elect from every nation. Compare Lenski and Hendriksen on this point. Parallel passages here are John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:12-21. More could be mentioned but these are sufficient. (Buls)

Again and again the Scriptures stress the fact that IN CHRIST, in His suffering, death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, justification, eternal salvation FOR ALL MEN is an accomplished fact. Because of their twin false teaching of a limited atonement and synergism, the Reformed (and those like them) teach that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification are merely potential, merely making it possible for all to be saved. Read Article IV of the Apology and Article II of the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) where again and again reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, redemption are used synonymously and interchangeably as accomplished facts for all men, posited in the means of grace for all. (Buls)

Even some Lutherans claim that although John 3:16 is universal, 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 4:25 are merely potential. That won't do. To deny the universality of the justification of all men, in Christ, at Romans 4:25 or the universality of reconciliation of all men, in Christ, at 2 Corinthians 5:19, means to deny the universal atonement per se. (Buls)

Back to verse 16: "so that" with the indicative, to denote actual result, is found only here and at Galatians 2:13. (It can be used with the infinitive to denote actual result). Note that  "so much-so that" are correlative. The first "His" is relational denoting the divinity of Jesus. "One and only" makes that even clearer. KJV, NKJV, NASB, and AAT (2nd ed.) translate "only-begotten" denoting the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. All other translations have "only" which is surely wrong. (Buls)

By the way, some commentators feel that verses 14-21 are the words of the Evangelist not those of Jesus, for only in this passage Jesus calls Himself by this term. But if Jesus gave the word John at 1:18, why couldn't He use it of Himself? It is powerful in the mouth of Jesus. He knew that He proceeded from all eternity from the Father and yet He was willing to become man to die for us. (Buls)

*world.* All people on earth—or perhaps all creation (see note on 1:9). (CSB)

kosmos – This refers to everything in the world but in this case especially that portion of the population that is hostile to the God. This word is used 75 times in John.

*that he gave.* See Isa 9:6. (CSB)

God gives, gives, gives. That's the story of the Gospel. "That" introduces another purpose clause, repeating and amplifying the one in verse 15. There it was stressed from the point of view of the Father sending and giving His eternal Son.  "Whoever believes," not restrictive but invitational, for all. "Not perish," death and destruction, for the believer, are gone, abolished. For him death is not dying but the beginning of eternal life. "But" following a negative is very strong: "quite to the contrary." We know nothing quite so antithetical as eternal death and eternal life. (Buls)

God not only sent His Son, but also also offered Him to the world. He became our atoning sacrifice. (TLSB)

This verse brings together several of John’s most important and frequent theological words: *theos*, “God,” *huios*, “Son,” *monogenēs*, “only-begotten,” *agapaō*, “love” (about 40 occurrences, including the noun *agapē*), *kosmos*, “world” (75), *pisteuō*, “believe” (90), and *zōē* “life” (35, of which 17 are with *aiōnios*, “eternal”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

The conjunction *hōste* (NIV: “that”) followed by the indicative emphasizes that the result actually happened (M. Zerwick, Biblical Greek, pp. 121–22, para. 350). The Father actually gave up his Son to death, only to receive him back in glory, fulfilling the typology of Abraham, a human father who also did not spare his only son and received him back alive (Gen 22:16; cf. Rom 8:32). The adjective monogenēs may mean “one and only, unique,” or “only-begotten” (see Holy Bible: New Testament—New Evangelical Translation, 2d ed. [Cleveland, NET Publishing, 1992] appendix 2. c. 6., pp. 542–44). The hina clause indicates purpose: God sacrificed his Son in order to save. This reasserts the bronze serpent typology of vv 14–15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

God’s love brought results. He offered the ultimate sacrifice for the world He loved. (PBC)

*one and only Son.* See 1:14, 18; cf. Ge 22:2, 16; Ro 8:32. Although believers are also called “sons of God” (2Co 6:18; Rev 21:7), Jesus is uniquely God’s Son. (CSB)

monogene - Sole or only born. – auios A child or son. In this case the son was not adopted like we are.

BELIEVES – pisteuo - To have faith in God. Found 90 times in John.

“Whoever believes in (the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith,) may have eternal life (John 3:15) Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit” (FC SD VII 70-71). Luther: “Look at the words, I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking… No one is here excluded. God’s Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and like any other man, (you) belong to the number of those comprised in the word “all” (WLS 1859). (TLSB)

NOT PERISH – apollumi To be destroyed, in this case eternally. To die.

Eternal separation from God. Cf. Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48. “Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

ETERNAL – Adjectives like perpetual, forever, everlasting are used to describe eternal.

LIFE – Life like a lifetime.

**3:17-18** Jesus was sent to earth as an authoritative representative of the Father. A contrast should be noted between the judging/condemning and the saving act of his mission of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

**3:17** DID NOT - “so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

As noted above, verses 14-17 tell us what Christ accomplished for us. This verse is the last in this section. "For" is explanatory, emphatically elucidating verse 16. It tells us why God DID NOT and why He DID send His Son. Mankind has a bad conscience because of sinfulness and sin. According to his flesh he is always listening to Satan who pictures God as enemy, not as friend. Even Christians, insofar as they still have a flesh, all too often think of God as enemy and judge rather than as Savior and Friend in Christ. (Buls)

Jesus says: "God did NOT send His Son into the world in order to judge (condemn) the world, but, quite to the contrary, in order through Him (Christ) the world be saved." Compare John 12:47 and then His words to His enemies at 5:34. (Buls)

SEND SON – apostello The one who was set apart and sent specifically for this cause.

JUDGE – krino Someone who makes a decision and judges right from wrong. The trial in our case left to defend ourselves would result in being condemned, punished and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The Church of Rome, because of its works righteousness, was constantly presenting God as Judge. Over and over Luther said that the Gospel presents God as Savior, not as Judge. Compare Galatians 4:4.5 and Galatians 3:13.14. The "so that" clauses in Galatians 4:5 and 3:14 (two sets of them) respectively denote what we call objective and subjective justification. In Christ, the blessing of Abraham (justification) became effective for all nations. Christ redeemed all the condemned, all human beings. And in Galatians 4:5 we are told that Christ came to redeem the condemned, all human beings. The Gospel portrays Christ as Savior, not as Judge. (Buls)

We know that Christ will return in judgment, but at this time, Jesus doesn’t mention God’s alien work of condemning and crushing through the Law. Instead, he focuses completely on the unmerited favor God shows the world. While not explicit in this verse, *anōthen* remains implicit, for God sent Jesus from above into his creation, “in order that the world might be saved through him.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

SAVE – The following adjectives say it well: Deliver, protect, heal, preserve or make whole.

"Sent with a commission." Note that "all people -- the world" is used thrice in this verse: to denote Christ's incarnation, becoming a man, for all; again, for all people;and again, all people. Christ came to condemn no one, not even Judas. That should never be forgotten. Mix no Law into the Gospel. (Buls)

The two *hina* clauses show purpose from two different perspectives. In the first, the active voice asserts that God’s purpose was not to condemn. In the second, John goes against the natural flow of language and switches to the passive *sōthēi*, “be saved,” to emphasize the Son as the agent who does not carry out his saving work independently of the Father, but humbly serves the Father’s purpose. The NIV obliterates the difference between the two *hina* clauses; the KJV, NKJV, RSV and NET have it right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Another explanation. The obvious reason for which this verse is added is that people (even Christians) think of God merely as a judge. This verse has two more purpose clauses. The first tells us why God did NOT send His Son, and the second tells us why He DID send Him. Christians need to listen to this verse. Christians, too, often slip into the false idea that Jesus is merely a Judge. (Buls)

Note that "world" occurs three times in this verse. The first instance, in a prepositional phrase, denotes the incarnation. The second and third instances denote all mankind. (Buls)

By the way, if "kosmos" (according to the Reformed theology) in verse 16 means only the elect, the conclusion of verse 17 is difficult to understand. "Kosmos" simply must mean "all people." (Buls)

Note: Pentecost I is the same day as Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-17 clearly speaks of the Trinity. The Triune God is the saving God. One cannot be saved without faith in the Trinity. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. Many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian. Therefore, we must stress the Trinity in our teaching and preaching. (Buls)

**3:18** BELIEVES – For the first clause read Romans 8:1; John 3:36a; 5:24; Mark 16:16a. The believer is judged neither now nor on Judgment Day. He will hear only: "Come, ye blessed of My Father." Well, then, why are the majority lost? Jesus answers that with "but, however."  (Buls)

CONDEMNED – Luther: “All men are already condemned and imprisoned to be damned eternally, but the Son of God was given to us to redeem us from that judgment” (AE 22:380). (TLSB)

Kretzmann: The unbeliever refuses to believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And therefore this unbelief condemns him. . . Unbelief is thus the sin of sins, for it rejects the salvation which has been gained and is offered for all sins. . . Their sin is no longer the result of ignorance, but of deliberate choice and preference. (Buls)

Now read John 12:47.48. Jesus does not judge the rejecter. His Word of Law, which warns against rejection of the Gospel, will judge that man. Note the tense of the dejection verbs. The first denotes that judgment sets in at the time of refusal to believe. The second makes that refusal plain. Judgment begins with and is caused by man's refusal in the face of clear knowledge. The text is making plain that the unbeliever rejects God's plain revelation. "In the name of God's one and only Son," is adjectival, the specific revelation about Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. The judgment on the last day will be only the public announcement of what was already true in this life and finalized at the time of death. (Buls)

ALREADY – The final judgment has moved into the present with the coming of His kingdom (cf. Mt. 3:10). (TLSB)

*believes … does not believe.*† John is not speaking of momentary beliefs and doubts but of continuing, settled faith. (CSB)

Like a bitten Israelite, the sinner still carries the devil’s poison of original sin, but through believing in the Son he will live (*sola fide*). Whoever does not look to the Son stands condemned. The poison of sin will kill him because he has rejected the only (-begotten) Cure, and there is no other. His “name” is synonymous with his person, words, and work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Everything hangs on faith! In fact, judgment can be said to have taken place “already” (*ēdē*), based on the faith or lack of it in the hearers. *mē pepisteuken* in the perfect tense indicates a continuance in unbelief, rather than an initial recoil from the message. Compare this whole section (3:15–19) with 12:46–48 for some striking similarities. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:19-20** Imagery of light and darkness (cf. Jn 1:4–9) is now added to the motif of life and death (bronze serpent). *Prassō*, “does,” implies habit. Those who continue to practice worthless deeds hate the Son. They will do anything to stay out of the light because of what it does (cf. Job 24:13–17). *Elengchō* can mean “bring to light, expose,” “convict,” “reprove, correct,” or “punish” (*BAGD* p. 249); all are true. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Jesus gives a definition of what he means regarding judgment. The inner motive for choosing the darkness is because humankind is wicked and in need of saving. “Evil” is also translated “worthless.”

For those used to thinking of the end-times judgment, these verses add a dimension about “the judgment” (*hē krisis* with the article). Jesus’ words replicate the dualistic vocabulary of ch 1 (“light” and “darkness”). The life of the disciple in response to God’s gift is described simply: he “does what is true” (literally, *poiōn tēn alētheian*). The light comes and reveals us for who we really are. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:19** THE VERDICT – Greek “krisis, brings to mind the judicial process, including the adverse verdict brought on by rejecting the Son of God. (TLSB)

LIGHT – "This is" is like the English "now."  The English colon is inferred. Look at John 1:1-5. Jesus is the only source of true spiritual light. Compare John 8:12 and 1 John 2:18. This Light shines in all the Messianic promises beginning with Genesis 3:15. He is the comforting Light of forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, redemption. "Has come," has come with permanent results (perfect tense). This refers to His incarnation. The implication is that this Light shines on all men. John 1:9. (Buls)

BUT LOVED DARKNESS – "This is" is like the English "now."  The English colon is inferred. Look at John 1:1-5. Jesus is the only source of true spiritual light. Compare John 8:12 and 1 John 2:18. This Light shines in all the Messianic promises beginning with Genesis 3:15. He is the comforting Light of forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, redemption. "Has come," has come with permanent results (perfect tense). This refers to His incarnation. The implication is that this Light shines on all men. John 1:9. (Buls)

**3:20** DOES EVIL – Greek “phaulos” means base. (TLSB)

On verses 20 and 21 Stoeckhardt says:

Jesus here sheds light on the contrast between faith and unbelief, which also becomes evident in the works and conduct of man, because he who does not believe shies away from the light, hiding from others his evil works, of which he must be ashamed. However, he who believes in Christ, doing what is right before God, confidently stepping before God and man, with his good works, which are done in God. (Buls)

Man can judge another man only by his works. Verse 20 elucidates and explains what was said in verses 18 and 19 chiastically. Verse 18 speaks of the believer, verse 19 of the unbeliever. But in verses 20 and 21 this is reversed. Note the contrasting words in verses 20 and 21. Look at John 5:29 where the same distinction of verbs is made: "worthless -- genuine;" "hatred opposed to attraction;" "exposed as opposed to made plain."  Note what the two verses have in common. In the former, shame is involved whereas in the latter, forthright openness is stressed. We translate the two verses literally to bring out the utter contrast and the meaning of crucial words: "You see, everyone who constantly practices worthless deeds hates the Light, and therefore does not approach the Light, lest his deeds be exposed. But the one who is constantly producing the true and genuine works approaches the Light in order that his works may be made plain as to the fact that they have been worked by God Himself."  (Buls)

HATES THE LIGHT… EXPOSED – Those with low moral standards hate disclosure of their foul deed, just as marauders of the night flee from the light of day. (TLSB)

The unbeliever loves the works of darkness but is ashamed of them. That is proved by the fact that he refuses to approach Christ, for if he did, his works would be exposed for what they are, worthless and actively evil. However, the believer, who by faith in Jesus does the will of God (third use of the Law), gladly approaches Christ so that everyone can see that God and God alone "works in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Compare 1 John 1:5-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:13. (Buls)

**3:21** LIVES BY THE TRUTH – Augustine: “He that does truth accuses his evil works in himself, spares not himself, forgives not himself, that God may forgive him: for that which he desire God to forgive, he himself acknowledges, and he come to the light; to which he is thankful for showing him what he should hate in himself. (NPNF1 &:86). (TLSB)

The unbeliever, dead in his trespasses and sins, is a man of dead and worthless works and is actually ashamed of these works, though he glories in them. The believer, alive unto God by faith in Christ, forgiven and reconciled, is a man of living and genuine works of which he is not ashamed. He gladly acknowledges that God is the author not only of his salvation but also of his new life in Christ. Read Matthew 5:16. The Christian wants people to see his works, not himself. His works glorify the heavenly Father. (Buls)

“[He who] does the works that flow from a regenerated heart, such a one comes to the light. He is glad to have his works revealed in order that they may speak for him. For they are in reality not his own . . . they are done and performed in God, who giveth both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Those are truly good works that are done in communion with God” (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary*, NT [St. Louis: Concordia, 1921] 1:424). V 10 of the Epistle says much the same thing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

HAS BEEN DONE THROUGH GOD – God is at work in those who have responded to the Gospel (cf. Php. 2:13; 1 Th. 2:13). (TLSB)

**3:16–21** God gives His only Son as a sacrificial gift to deliver the world from condemnation and to give eternal life to those who believe in Him. When we continue in an immoral lifestyle, we naturally resist divine disclosure of our sin and thus our need for a Savior. Do not flee the light, but repent. God has revealed His strong love in His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive your sins and give you life. • O heavenly Father, grant that my life may be a vivid testimony to Your sacrificial and faithful love in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)