



Who are we?

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With the memory verse stated as Eph. 2:10 for this study, we will pick up the full expression of the natural unit of thought expression that it belongs to, verses one through ten.

I. **Context**

The nature of this passage is that of a short description of the nature of Christian experience of salvation. There are foundational two emphases in these verses: who we were before Christ came into our lives (vv. 1-3); and who we've become after Christ has entered our lives (vv. 4-10). It should be noted that in the underlying Greek text these ideas are divided up into three sentences: (1) vv. 1-7; (2) vv. 8-9; (3) v. 10. All of these sentences are much longer than a natural English sentence can be and still make clear sense. But in reality, they are relatively short sentences for the writing style found in the Pauline section of the New Testament.

a. **Historical**

The compositional history of Ephesians poses some interesting challenges. The document is written in the form of an ancient letter (See my [Epistolary Genre](#) discussion for details), following roughly the [traditional segments](#): Praescriptio (1:1-2); Proem (1:3-23); Body (2:1-6:22); Conclusio (6:23-24). In the Adscriptio section (to the recipients) in the beginning segment, "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus" (NRSV), many of the earliest manuscripts of this document do not contain the words "who are in Ephesus." Many scholars have taken to as a signal that this document was written as a "circular" letter, that is, these words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ were intentionally left out of the original composition, so that as the letter was read to different congregations in different cities the appropriate reference would be inserted orally by the reader. That this kind of thing was done in the ancient world can be demonstrated with other writings outside the New Testament. Although not everyone concurs with this view, it is highly probable that such an understanding correctly assesses the text situation.

This then complicates the identification of when, where, to whom, by whom. The document itself doesn't provide the personal details about either the author or especially the intended readers that one finds in Romans, 1/2 Corinthians, Galatians etc. How to account for this occasions a wide diversity of responses. Without going into detailed elaboration of the options, let me simply state my convictions on this. In spite of some serious problems, I tend toward the more traditional view point of Pauline authorship and thus see the document written as a part of the later writing ministry of the apostle Paul in the 60s before his death in the middle 60s of the first Christian century. Ephesians belongs to the so-called [Prison Letters](#) of Paul that include Philipians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon.

This assumption implies that the letter was written probably while Paul was in prison in Rome in the early 60s, or perhaps prior to that when in prison in Caesarea (late 50s). Colossians was written at the same time and Ephesians is closely connected to it, sharing substantial vocabulary and writing style often



not found elsewhere in the Pauline section of the New Testament. The letter was intended to be read to a variety of churches, with Ephesus being one of primary ones. Largely because of this, but not entirely, the letter is broader in scope and less personal. The internal time and space markers as clues to history

inside the passage are not focused on geographical references to places on a map of the Mediterranean world. Instead, they are cosmologically focused. Spatially the issue is between our existence on planet earth (the cosmos, *κοσμός*) and Heaven (*οἱ ἐπουράνιοι*, lit. heavenly places). In our earthly existence Paul contrasts the period before Christ entered and the time after He entered. In that coming of Christ into our life, we enter into a dual existence where we continue to walk on the earth but enjoy the blessings of the heavenly place with Christ. Although not stated in this passage, elsewhere this becomes the basis of future hope in the full realization of those blessings after death takes us from this world to the one yet to come. In 2:1-10 Paul is primarily concerned with contrasting how we live now after Christ has entered our life to how our life was lived prior to his coming.

b. Literary

The literary setting for 2:1-10 is as follows. It stands as the introductory passage to the body of the letter. In the Proem (1:3-23) Paul expressed both praise to God for his wonderful blessings (vv. 3-14, incidently one very long sentence in the Greek text) and prayer intercession in behalf of his readers for God's richest blessings to come upon them (vv. 15-23, also a single sentence in the Greek text). 2:1-10 then builds upon the details of this lengthy prayer and provide a conceptual foundation for the body section of the letter that runs through 6:22. This segment follows a standard Pauline pattern in dealing first with spiritual concepts (chapters 2 and 3) as a foundation to exhortations to live a certain way as Christians blessed of God (chapters 4 - 6). Our passage anticipates this pattern with its initial emphasis upon spiritual status (vv. 1-9) leading to our purpose, "good works" (v. 10).

Thus in the Pauline logic of Ephesians who we are spiritually precedes what we can do spiritually, and will determine whether what we do in behavior has genuineness or not. In our church's exploration of "40 days of purpose" theme, this passage is a good starting point. The purpose guiding our day by day living both grows out of and depends on who we are spiritually. Without clear comprehension of that we have no ability to discern meaningful purpose to living.

II. Message

Who are we? The answer to that question comes into clear focus when we understand who we were.

The dividing line between those two segments is the coming of Christ into our lives. One important side note for 2:1-10. As you read the scripture text you will notice that the frame of reference shifts between “we” and “you” (plural). This is a frequent pattern in this document, as well some others of Paul. In most every instance in Ephesians, the “we” means we Jewish Christians and the “you” means you Gentile Christians. To us such contrast may seem trivial, but given the huge controversy over the role of non-Jews in the Christian community beginning in the 40s of the first Christian century (see [Acts 15](#) for one explosion of this), this was a critical issue in the early church. In fact in Ephesians itself, the next passage after 2:1-10 declares emphatically that God has brought non-Jews into his family and in Christ has destroyed the barriers between the two ethnic groups (2:11-22). Paul saw his ministry of evangelizing the non-Jewish world as playing an important role in that divine plan (3:1-13), which prompted him to offer a doxological praise to God (3:14-21). The patterns of behavior treated in 4:1-6:22 promote unified commitment to living free from sinful behavior. Even the two concluding prayers in the Conclusio (6:23-24) promote this theme: “23 Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.”

a. Before Christ, vv. 1-3

Greek New Testament

<2:1> Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, <2:2> ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας· <2:3> ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί· θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

NRSV

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

NLT

1 Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. 2 You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else.

Comments:

A couple of preliminary observations. The “you’all” and “we” contrast surfaces here. Verses one and two focus on the non-Jewish readers of this letter, while verse three picks up the “all us Jewish Christians” perspective. Secondly, in the single Greek sentence encompassing verses one through seven, the core foundational clause doesn’t surface until verse four and even then is interspersed with expansion elements: “**God...has made us alive together with Christ Jesus...**” Verses one through three establish who it is that God has brought to life: both the spiritually dead Gentile and also the spiritually dead Jew.

What then is spiritual death? Verses one through three answer that question. Three essential points are made by Paul.

(1) In verse one we lived in spiritual death. Paul said we were dead, but we were alive before becoming Christians. What is he getting at? In the schema of 2:1-10, death precedes life, rather than the physical sequence of life followed by death. What is this death? Notice the rest of verse one in both the NRSV and the NLT translations. The NRSV says “were dead *through* the trespasses and sins...” But the NLT says “were dead, doomed forever *because* of your many sins.” The Today’s English Version is along the same lines with its rendering, “In the past you were spiritually dead *because* of your disobedience and sins.” The difference in these two patterns of expression play off the Greek expression. Although neither pattern is incorrect, the broader more Hebraic way of thinking probably in the back of Paul’s mind is that in the midst of our waywardness and sinfulness we were living in spiritual death, a death that was sealing our eternal

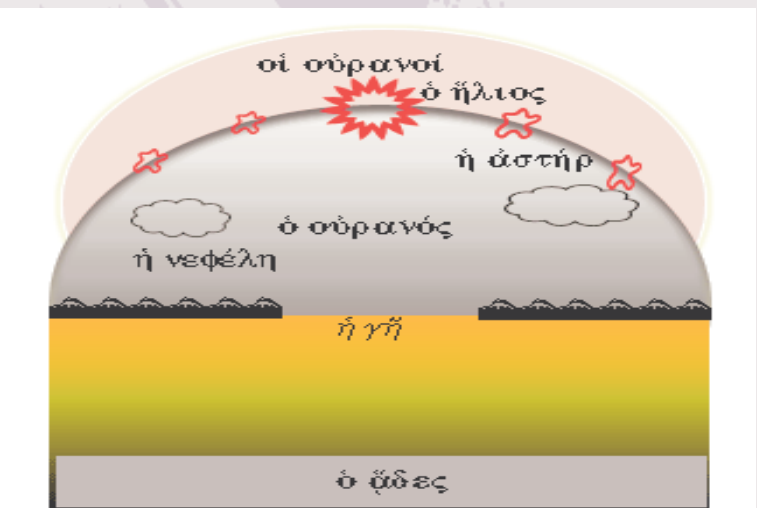
fate in Hell unless the situation was somehow changed. Both English translation patterns attempt to build off this broader idea with correctly derived ideas: “through...”; “because...” But a deeper reality can be easily overlooked. Spiritual death exists in the cesspool of disobedience and sin. Death both feeds off wrong behavior and at the same time feeds it as well. As Paul continues to declare in the relative clause of verse two: “in which you formerly lived out your life...” The ‘which’ goes back to the reference to disobedience and sin at the end of verse one. The point being that the way we lived out our lives was in this cesspool. Our behavior, our attitudes, our relationships -- all this is covered by the word picture of “walking” -- were a reflection of and driven by the spiritual and moral cesspool that our life existed in. For those non-Jews in the first century the reference here could allude to patterns of behavior considered highly offensive even in today’s Hollywood.

Romans 1:20-31 (NRSV) paints a rather grim picture of the dark side of that world: “20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they [the godless Gentiles] are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” This is the moral cesspool of death.

(2) We live our lives under the control of evil powers. In verse two Paul asserted that these Gentile Christians prior to conversion “used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air” (NLT). The ‘course of this world’ is close to our idiom, “go with the flow” or “keeping up with the Jones.” It underscores what all of us have heard our teenagers at one time or another declare, “But dad, everybody’s doing it.” On the surface they were living like most everyone else, a life of sinful indulgence. But the next phrase, standing in apposition to this phrase, defines what doing what everybody else does really is. It’s living under the control of Satan himself. Paul uses cosmological terms here to declare this. Satan is “the ruler of the power of the air.”

Let me borrow a graphic I created for my Greek grammar to illustrate. In the way ancient Jews -- and Christians -- viewed the world, as reflected in this illustration, the space between earth and the canopy at the top of the sky was the region controlled by Satan and served as his launch pad for attacks on people on the earth. Thus Paul’s phrase here, and several times elsewhere, reflects this perspective. The devil rules absolutely that space above the earth and below where God is -- above the canopy of the sky -- and from there controls the actions of those not shielded from his power by Christ. Although Gentiles assumed they were the masters of their own fate, in reality another far greater power was controlling it, Satan himself.

At the end of verse two Paul transitions over to the Jewish side while connecting in the Gentile aspect as well. (3) Satan is also



the spirit at work in the “sons of disobedience.” This phrase is a play on the [Hebrew idiom](#) “son of Abraham.” But they’re not true sons of Abraham; instead, they’re the sons of disobedience, in contrast to the faithful Abraham. In brilliant expression Paul declares that this same evil power working on the Gentiles from above the earth is also alive in the Jews as well leading them to disobey the God who provided their redemption through Christ Jesus.

In verse three Paul extends this “sons of disobedience” image with the declaration: “All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.” No Jew could look with contempt upon the sinfulness of the Gentiles, since their lives were just as consumed by fleshly and sensual passions. In a repetition of his play on the “son of Abraham” idiom, he then declares that “sons of disobedience” are also “children of wrath” just like the rest of the world. The meaning here is obvious: people doomed to face the awful wrath of God in eternal judgment.

Thus Paul moves from spiritual death lived out in a moral cesspool to eternal damnation from the wrath of God. The pattern of deviant behavior defined as rebellion, sin, and disobedience both feeds off this death and nourishes it.

But notice Paul’s verb tense here: “You formerly were”; “we all once behaved ourselves...” A dramatic change has taken place that moved both Gentile and Jew from this pitiful existence into something new and different.

b. After Christ, vv. 4-10

Greek New Testament

<2:4> ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, <2:5> καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, - χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι - <2:6> καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, <2:7> ἵνα ἐνδείξῃται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. <2:8> τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· <2:9> οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. <2:10> αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ

NRSV

4 But **God**, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** — by grace you have been saved — 6 and **raised us up with him** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

NLT

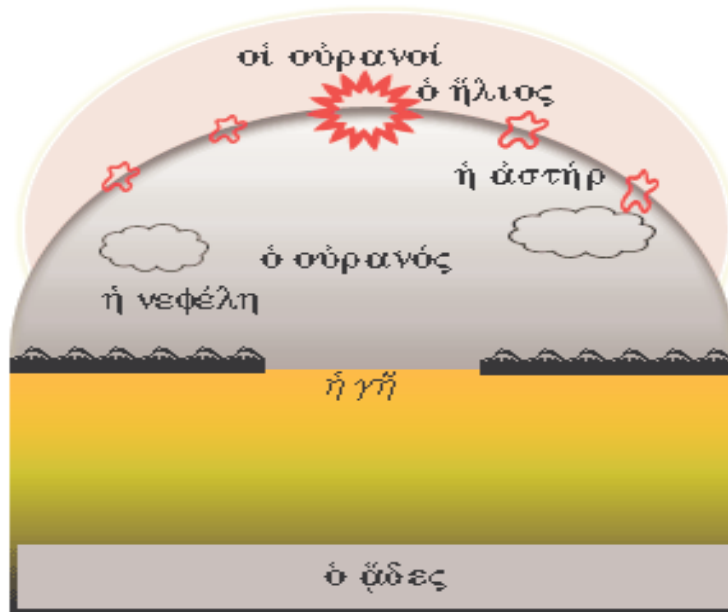
4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, 5 that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's special favor that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms – all because we are one with Christ Jesus. 7 And so God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us through Christ Jesus. 8 God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Comments:

The foundational thought of these verses is the core expression mentioned earlier: “But God...has made us alive together with Christ Jesus...” This is then extended by grammatical compound declarations:

“and raised us up with him and seated us with him”

Some observations here. First, the God who did this is “rich in mercy,” and did these things “out of the great love with which he loved us (v. 4; NRSV). No cruel Greek Zeus could have or would have reached down to pitiful humanity with such spectacular actions. God’s grace is the instrument of our salvation, not our merit or achievements.



What did he do? Paul’s umbrella term here is “saved us” (v. 7). Rescue from disaster is at the heart of the issue. We who were children of wrath, doomed to eternal damnation, now have been saved from such a fate, both Jew and Gentile believers. How did God do that? Paul’s answer here: God made us alive, raised us up, and seated us. Within the framework of the ancient Jewish perspective this means that God took sinful humanity on earth living in spiritual death, headed for doom at physical death into the underworld of Sheol or Hades and made that humanity alive. The process and fate of death was reversed and deliverance brought about. This entailed a spiritual resurrection, a raising up that ended in being seated in the Heavenly places

above the canopy of the limits of the sky where Satan rules supremely. We are seated in the throne room of Heaven where God controls everything. Spiritually we now live with God. Thus we have a dual existence. Our earthly existence still continues own, but our real existence is already with God in Heaven. Later Paul will speak of the mystery of our faith. This is a part of what he is alluding to. But here this is what Paul meant by his term ‘saved us.’

The marvelous aspect of all this experience is that it is “with Christ Jesus.” Just as Jesus went from the death of Calvary to resurrection life on Easter Sunday and then to ascension to Heaven forty days later, we who are connected to Christ by faith share in that very same experience personally with Christ. We in the moment of our faith commitment moved from death to being made alive then to being raised up and then to being seated in Heaven with God next to Christ at the banquet table of the Almighty. Notice the verb tenses for all three core verbs: “made us alive, raised us up, seated us...” These actions are linked to Jesus’ experience, and through faith commitment become our experience now. This is a part of the mystery. That is, something that can’t be clearly explained to an outsider. Rather, it must be experienced in order for its reality to be grasped.

Paul in Gal. 2 describes the same thing with slightly different words (NRSV): “19 For when I tried to keep the law, I realized I could never earn God’s approval. So I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. 20 I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” His cosmology here is to focus on the continued physical life on the earth, and that Christ through the indwelling Spirit lives inside Paul during the days on earth guiding Paul. Although the focus is different, the core spiritual reality is the same in both passages. Whether one stresses existence in Heaven or on earth as a believer, Christ is present with us because of his death and resurrection.

Verse seven points toward purpose. Why did God do this for both sinful Jew and Gentile? “So that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” God’s motivation was to demonstrate his love for all the world and by his gracious deliverance of us who believe the rest of the world can be convinced of that divine love. Our salvation has a deeper objective that reaches beyond us. We who are so blessed by God are witnesses and evidence to an unbelieving world of that love and power to deliver.

Verses eight through ten begin to tie up the final strings. Verse eight repeats the interruption in verse five -- by grace you are saved -- with the additional qualifier "by faith." Our English language doesn't have the ability to clearly distinguish the conceptualization in the Greek text. In the English "you are saved" is qualified two ways: (1) by grace and (2) through faith. In very clear Greek expression Paul declared God's grace is the direct means of salvation. Our faith response is the channel through which that saving grace flows into our lives. Our faith doesn't become an agent of salvation. Paul is adamant here. Such a rescue as described above is exclusively the powerful work of God alone.

In the second part of verse eight Paul makes this abundantly clear with his expression: "and this not from yourself, rather God's gift." Verse nine then adds the Pauline denial of his old Pharisaical perspective that one's own Torah obedience could effect salvation. His Damascus Road experience had forever convinced him that no one could ever possibly lift himself up to God acceptably by his own boot straps. This promoted spiritual boasting and arrogance. The divine grace through Christ eliminated any possibility of us bragging about how good we've become.

Verse ten comes back to summarize the essence of the passage. We -- both Jew and Gentile Christian -- stand as the product of God's craftsmanship. He created us "in Christ Jesus." We are the recipients of this divine grace, not the achievers of it.

Now Paul brings us down from sitting around God's banquet table in Heaven back to our earthly life from the point of being made alive. What are these remaining days for, before rejoining Jesus in Heaven permanently? What is our purpose? Paul's answer: to live out our lives doing the good works that God has prescribed for us. Although not immediately clear in the English expression, the Greek signals a connection between this purpose statement in verse ten and the previous one in verse seven. The link is this. How does it become evident to an unbelieving world that God has produced such an amazing expression of saving grace in our lives? How can they see this grace of God at work? Prior to experiencing the profound rescue of God personally, they have absolutely no way to understand or grasp the spiritual reality that has taken place in our lives. Put simply, how can they see God at work in us? Verse ten answers that question: by the good deeds they see us doing, that is, by the dramatic change in our behavior and life-style after becoming a Christian.

If no change in our behavior takes place, there's no way a darkened world can see God's grace. That's a huge responsibility God has placed on our shoulders.

Now summing up. The lesson theme is why are we here. What's our purpose? Verses one through ten sum things up well. Our rotten sinful lives have been rescued from God's wrath in eternal doom. We have been made alive spiritually and are seated at God's banquet table. But there's empty chairs at that table. Others need to be seated as well. Although we sit at God's table we also continue to live on planet earth. In that aspect of our living we stand as God's craftsmanship, his product. As the others see us as the achievement of God's grace through the transformation of our living from sinful actions to good deeds, they can realize the power of God's grace to change them as well, so they can also be seated at God's table. That's our purpose in these remaining days before rejoining Jesus permanently and fully at God's table in Heaven.

When we begin realizing who we are spiritually, the rest falls into place. It's a wonderful day to realize that every one of us who are believers have stamped across our life: "Made in Heaven by God himself." Hopefully the world around us won't have to look hard to see that label.

Postscript: Why I detest a proof-text method of Bible study.

This lesson originally grew out of our church commitment to the 40 days of purpose program, which in itself is a worthwhile effort. The Bible study lessons provided for churches and individuals to use, however, represent some of the worst proof-texting of scripture that I've come across in quite some time. The SBC Lifeway materials also have become increasingly bad at this. They have used what I have labeled for over three decades a Baptist version of Jehovah's Witness style proof texting of scripture. I have spent the last three decades both in the pulpit and in the seminary class room crusading against this kind of distortion of God's Word in Baptist life. I'm deeply convinced this has played a major role in creating the spiritual shallowness that plagues church life today, and that has helped create the mess that now exists in the Southern Baptist Convention. The converse of that is simply that spiritual renewal will come about in proportion to our willingness to adopt substantive methods of Bible study that provide the Holy Spirit a greater opportunity to speak in deeply convicting ways to the reader of God's Word.

Here is the fatal flaw in such proof-texting approaches. Although they usually fly under the banner of thematic study of the Bible, this false label is misleading and virtually always results in distortion of what the Bible is saying. The process usually works this way. What I describe is what I was asked to contribute to from Sunday School Board leaders in the late 1970s in a curriculum planning conference. Nothing has changed since then, so far as I can tell.

The planners adopt a catchy theme label, e.g., the love of God. Then based on principles of logical reasoning, an outline is developed. Say as follows:

- I. God loves the sinful world.
- II. God loves his church.
- III. God sent Jesus to die for humanity.

The outline has to follow logical progression of thought in some way and be clear and simple enough for everyone in a Sunday School class to follow, normally assuming a sixth grade reading level.

Once the outline is in place, then it has to be -- at least among evangelical Christians -- buttressed up by supporting scripture texts. So the planner then searches the Bible to find scripture verses or passages that will supposedly prove biblically the correctness of each of the outline points. With the above outline, a whole fistful of passages could be listed under each point. Whala! A Sunday School lesson is born.

What's wrong here? A whole bunch of things is seriously wrong with this approach. First, the whole process contradicts and undermines the foundational principle since the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s of sola scriptura, that is, the scriptures alone are the sole foundation for religious faith and practice. What is the real foundation here is logical reasoning, not the Bible. The Bible didn't determine the framework of thought, rationalism did! We Baptists have been infected with an atheistic oriented German rationalism via Scottish Common Sense Realism for a long, long time, and most have no awareness of it. If the Bible is genuinely the authority base for our spiritual understanding, then it must be allowed to not only provide the content of that understanding, but also it must be allowed to shape the framework or structure of that content. That is, the context of scripture is critical to the meaning of the text. Otherwise, the Bible is not genuinely the authority base for religious teaching. Any claim to such from this methodology is blantly phony and deceptive!

Secondly, in virtually every instance that I have examined over the past forty years of professional ministry, the commentary built on an outline such as the above example will either directly or indirectly claim that this is what the Bible teaches. To be sure, the headings in isolation from one another may very well be taught in different places in scripture. But when we impose an organizing structure onto those headings in some kind of outlining process, we are distorting scripture with the subtle but false implication that this organizing framework also exists in the Bible. Thus we have imposed Reason as the ultimate authority for this framework, and may very well -- whether consciously or unconsciously -- elevate it to the level of authority over scripture that belongs exclusively to the God who inspired the scripture in the first place. At the very least, we assume our patterns of reasoning are God's. This has become the tail wagging the dog! And not a place that I ever want to be found in! Bible study is to listen for God speaking to us, not to hear the echo of our own voice or some commentator's voice coming to us disguised as God's voice!

Thus the approach of this lesson, and subsequent ones, will be to take the memory verse, go back to the scripture to find a natural unit of scripture text, called technically a pericope, and use it as the basis of our Bible study. My fervant prayer is that each of us then will hear the voice of God as we study.