

**Series: God's Love Changes Everything**

**Text: Ephesians 2:1-10**

**Title: God's love changes our status:**

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I was in college when **Facebook** began. Mark Zuckerberg and I are only a few months apart in age. When I was in Bible College training for ministry, he was at Harvard, creating a social network that would transform the way the world communicates. I remember being a junior in college and setting up a Facebook account. I had to upload a profile picture. This week I got online and found my first two profile pictures. Here I am playing ultimate **Frisbee on a beach** in California; here I am in front of a **Dr. Pepper mural** in Wichita, Kansas. Clearly phone cameras have come a long way since then (2.5 megapixels? That's incredible!!!). When Facebook first came out it was only for college students. You had to have a college email to sign up. And people were only interested in two things: your profile picture and what else??? **Your relationship status**. There were options like: Single, in a relationship, engaged, married, divorced-my personal favorite, it's complicated. Your status says a lot about where you are at in life. Oftentimes you wouldn't even know where you were at with a person you were dating until it became what?? Facebook official. Your status says something important about you.

As we continue in our series through Ephesians, we are talking about how God's love changes everything. Today, we are going to see that **God's love changes our status**. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Ephesians 2:1-10. In this passage we are going to see what our status is without Jesus and how through Jesus, God's love and mercy changes our status forever. Let's begin by looking at the first three verses: **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 flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

Paul begins this passage by talking about the status of all humanity apart from Jesus. And there are three basic elements to it. Here's the first thing we see: **Without Jesus we are enslaved to sin**. Look at the first two verses again: **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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. 2:1-2**

Paul is saying that every one of us has committed transgressions and sins. The Greek word for **sin** in this passage is *hamartia*, which was originally used of archers who were shooting at a target. To sin was simply to miss the mark. It was to make a mistake. Shooting for the bullseye, you hit the edge of the target, maybe missed the target altogether. Paul says not only that we have sinned but that we all follow the **ways of the world** which means that instead of letting God teach how to live, we are taking our cues from culture. Listen to what it says in **1 John 2:16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world**. What does it look like to follow the way of the world? We follow the lust of the flesh and do whatever feels right. We follow the lust of the eyes and reach out for whatever looks right, we follow the pride of life, always looking out for number # 1. This is what theologians refer to as the inward curvature of the heart. That is the

way of the world. Listen to how Tim Keller describes it: **The sin the Bible is referring to is like having a little computer in the very center of your heart that never stops. It goes on and on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. And do you know what it's doing? It's analyzing everything, viewing everything, seeing everything—every person, every object, every interchange, every event, every setting—and it's basically saying, “What's in it for me?” Everything is being analyzed with regard to how it benefits your happiness, your glory, your power, your reputation, your comfort, your control of things. Everything is dealt with based upon this one question: ‘How does it help me?’**” That's what it means to follow the way of the world. We ultimately do whatever we want. If we did that when we were driving, no rules, no regulations, just every driver doing what they want, could you imagine what it would be like to venture onto the roads? The accidents, the injuries, the loss of life! No one wants to drive on roads where all the other drivers just do whatever they want. But morally speaking, that is the world we live in. And the collateral damage is everywhere.

So we've sinned; we've followed the way of the world...AND of **the ruler of the kingdom of the air**. This is another way of saying that apart from Jesus, we are under the influence of Satan. Paul wants us to realize that the world we live in is not spiritually neutral. It's like you can choose to either worship God or live in a spiritual Switzerland where you are just disengaged from all things spiritual. There are spiritual realities at work, and those who are not worshipping Christ are, to a very real extent, under an oppressive, dark spiritual influence. Think of it like living in the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Not every person in the Soviet Union in the 70s was a communist, but every person living in the Soviet Union in the 70s was under the oppressive power and influence of communism. Outside of Christ, we are under the oppressive power of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. There is no neutral territory in the spiritual realms.

Now that's the first element of our status: without Jesus, we are enslaved to the power of sin; and it leads to a second element: **without Jesus, we are spiritually dead**. That's the reality that he points out in 2:1 **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins**. I want to be very clear about this. To say that we are spiritually dead apart from Christ does not mean that everything we do is evil. It doesn't mean we are as bad as we could be or that we are as bad as other people. It simply means that apart from God, we do not have spiritual life. You can be a kind and generous person, a good neighbor and wonderful friend...and still be spiritually dead. One-time Jesus was speaking to a man named Nicodemus. This man was very moral, very religious. He was actively engaged in the community—a good man, but this is what Jesus said to him: **John 3:3 “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”** Translation: It doesn't matter how many good things you do. It doesn't matter how wonderful the people in the community think you are. Without Jesus we do not have spiritual life; we need to be born again.

So without Jesus we are spiritually dead, but that's not the worst part about it. Paul ultimately tells us: **Without Jesus we are deserving of wrath**. 2:3 **Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath**. My guess is that this is not exactly what you were hoping to hear about when you decided to come to church today. I sure hope Dan preached on wrath! I think the reality is that we are not as opposed to wrath as we assume we are. It's common for people to say things like, “I want to focus on the love of God, not the wrath of God.” But we are actually all for wrath, as long as in our minds it is directed to the right people, at the right time, for the right

reasons. I've sat in a courtroom with a family whose daughter with a mental handicap was raped by one of her caregivers. You better believe that just about every person in that courtroom wanted that man to face the wrath of the state. When people fly planes into our buildings, we want them to feel the wrath of the military. When someone kidnaps and tortures a child, even if we never met that child something deep within us requires there to be consequences. If someone who commits a serious crime gets off easy, what does the public do? There's outrage. We demand they face the consequences. See, we believe in wrath. At times we even long for wrath as long as it is directed to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons. Listen to how John Stott defines the wrath of God: **God's wrath is the result of his personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his settled refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve instead to condemn it. God's wrath is neither spite, nor malice, nor animosity, nor revenge. It is never arbitrary or subject to mood, whim, or caprice. It is entirely predictable. Because God's righteousness is perfect, he always reacts to evil in the same unchanging, uncompromising way.**

That's what God's wrath is like. Every one of us can agree we've missed the mark. Every one of us can agree we followed the ways of the world and have lived for ourselves. Some may be better than others' some may be worse than others. But we all know that we have all sinned. Most of us, however, live under the pacifying illusion that because it was a long time ago, or because we've almost forgotten about it, or because we didn't do it with malicious intent, or because others did it even worse than we did, that we won't be held accountable. That's not how the universe works. God's perfect righteousness and holiness requires him to come against sin in all of its forms. That that means that you and I, apart from Christ, are deserving of wrath.

So here is what we see in the first three verses of Ephesians 2. **Without Jesus we are enslaved to sin, spiritually dead, and deserving wrath.** How about that for a status update?! I have a good friend who is a part of this church who is an oncologist. One of the hardest parts of her job is sitting down with patients and sharing the news that they have cancer, and that it's terminal. Giving a diagnosis like that is one of the hardest things a doctor ever has to do. I asked her a few weeks ago how she goes about delivering news like that. She said, "Obviously I want to be compassionate and caring, but the most important thing I can do for them is to clearly communicate the truth. They have to fully understand the situation they are facing in order to make the right decision as a family." So wise. That's what Paul is doing for all of us here. Like a good doctor he sits down with us and tells us the diagnosis: We have sinned. We are spiritually dead. We are deserving of wrath. Without Jesus, that is our status. But luckily for us, God's love changes our status. Paul doesn't leave us there! Listen to the next few verses:

**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 is 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 handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** This is such an incredible passage

about the love of God. And Paul is telling us that God's love changes our status. Let's look at the three changes that are made.

**Because of God's love we are made alive.** We see this in 2:4-5 **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.** Jesus' body was dead in the tomb and then God gave him new life. And Paul says you were dead in your sins, and just like God gave Jesus new life, he wants to give you new life. Listen to how 2 Corinthians 5:17 says it: **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (ESV).** Jesus's mission was not to make bad people good; his mission was to make dead people alive. God's love gives us new life. And that happens the moment we place our faith in him.

A friend of mine was guest preaching at a church about a year ago. And this church had an outreach program for non-Christians to attend to learn more about the Christian faith. A woman who was a part of that program and was not a Christian was asked to share her story for about 4-5 minutes in each of their three services. There are several thousand people in their church. She got up in the first two services and shared about how she grew up Jewish, was presently agnostic, but loved the outreach program at the church. She invited all other skeptics to join the next meeting. Then, toward the end of the second service, the love of God came upon her so powerfully and right in that moment she surrendered her life to Jesus. In the third service she got up and said, "I literally just now gave my life to Christ." The first two times she gave her story she was a non-believer. The third time, she was a believer. From death to life. The moment she placed her faith in Jesus.

Because of God's love we are made alive, but it gets better than that! We also see that **Because of God's love we are united with Christ.** Look at **2:6 God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.** Each of these words in Greek come from the word *syn* (as part of two different, compound words), which is where in the English we get the words *synchronized* and *synergy*. People and energy working together as one. Unity, alignment. Most of us have smartphones. And with the cloud, when technology is working, what happens when you open a note or take a new photo on your phone? It syncs up with all the other devices you have. You made a change on your phone, but it's automatically updated on your tablet and your computer because they are synced up. That's what Paul is saying has happened to us. We are synced up with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. Everything that is true of Christ now becomes true of you. This is the great exchange. Jesus syncs himself up with us in the incarnation and takes on our weakness, our frailty, on the cross he takes on our sin and our shame; then he receives the wrath from God that we deserve and dies the death we should have died. He is synced up with us. But the Scriptures say it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. He rises from the dead, is seated in the heavenly realms and with all authority, all power, all majesty, what does he say? Would you like to be synced up with me? Everything that is true of me, my identity, my power, my glory, my resurrection life, I want that to be true of you! God's love not only gives us new life, it unites us with Christ! Everything that is true about him becomes true about us. It's the greatest exchange in the history of the world!

And it's all by God's grace. He's the one who has done all the work. That's why Paul says in 2:8-9 **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.** This is Paul's way of telling us again and again and again and again, so that there is no way we could miss that salvation is the free gift of God. It's not the result of our effort or our works. It is all from him! The essence of the other **religions** of the world is about what you have to **DO**. The essence of **Christianity** is what has been **DONE** for you.

Because of God's love we are made alive, alive and united with Christ, but it gets even better! **Because of God's love we now live for his glory.** In verse 2:10 Paul says **For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** This word **handiwork** is the Greek word *poiema*, used in the ancient world to describe the result of a master craftsman effort. It could refer to a painting, a beautiful building, a song, a statue. One of the best examples of this would be Michelangelo's **David**. Michelangelo is one of the greatest artists and craftsmen of all time, and this is one of the crowning achievements which he worked on between the years 1501 and 1504. It was originally commissioned to be placed on top of a building. When people looked at the finished piece, they said it was too exquisite to be placed on a roof. It needed to be down where everyone could appreciate it.

Keren and I were privileged enough to go to Italy for our honeymoon. We spent time in several different cities, but we spent three nights in Florence, and we got to see this statue in person. I'll never forget being in that museum. Again, Keren and I were on our honeymoon. This is kind of personal, but we had both saved ourselves for marriage. So our honeymoon was literally the first time we ever saw someone of the opposite gender without clothes on. I'm not trying to be inappropriate here, but after 30 years of waiting, it was a great experience! To those of you who are single: it is worth the wait. Keren is the woman of my dreams. I am enraptured with her beauty. She always told me she thought I was handsome and was attracted to me, but then we got to the museum and we were looking at this statue. She looked at it and then looked at me. Looked at it again and then looked back at me. One of these things is not like the others. I think I did 500 pushups in the hotel room that night!

Most of us don't have the beauty of physique of a perfectly chiseled statue, but in a very real way, we are God's handiwork. We are his master creation. One of the best aspects of walking through a museum is seeing one painting after the next, one statute after the next, one artifact after the next, all beautiful, all breathtaking, every room is another treasure trove. After several hours you are just overwhelmed with wonder and appreciation for the artists and their creativity, ingenuity, imagination, and skill. Paul is saying that walking into the church should be like that. But instead of looking at a thousand different works of art, all put together by different artists, we are a thousand different works of art, all fashioned by the same craftsman. That's what should happen every time we come to worship. We should look around and say, "Look at God's handiwork in *your* life--He's been so good to you. He has saved you; he is sanctifying you; he is beautifully and masterfully molding you into the image of his Son. Oh! And look at God's handiwork in *your* life--He's been so good to you, he has saved you, he is sanctifying you, he is beautifully and masterfully molding you into the image of his Son." One example after the next after the next after the next of his goodness and power and love.

And it's not just like God set us up as statues to never be moved. He created us as masterpieces to be put to work. So instead of thinking of yourself as a masterpiece like **this** (beautiful as it is) (Monet's famous lily pads), think of yourself as a masterpiece like **this** (gorgeous new truck). Think of all the planning, design work, construction, paint, and assembly that went into this...and it wasn't so it could sit in a garage. It was so that it could be put to work. God designed you perfectly and he built you just how he intended, with your intellect and wit and sense of humor and passions; but it wasn't so that we would sit on our rear ends and watch Netflix. He wants to put you to work! He has good deeds he has prepared in advance for us to do! Truth he wants to speak, people he wants to bless, kids he wants to adopt, students he wants to mentor, gifts he wants to give, encouragement he wants to speak-he wants to use you!

If you listened to preachers from 30, 40, 50 years ago, one of the main questions they would ask in so many of their sermons was this: **If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?** If you get hit by a bus or the Soviet Union drops a nuke, do you know you would go to heaven? Not a horrible question (I know some people who came to Christ because of that question). But I don't think it's the best question. What if instead of appealing to the unlikely extreme and asking, If you died tonight would you go to heaven we should ask instead, "**If you live tomorrow, will heaven come to earth?**" That's what it means to be God's handiwork. That's what it means to be united with Christ. Not only that he gave new life, but that we are used by God to bring new life to a world in great need! Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And that's not just our prayer; that is our assignment, our mission, our purpose. Not just to go to heaven, but to bring heaven to earth.

We began today by talking about status updates. Without Jesus, our status isn't good. **Without Jesus we are enslaved to sin, spiritually dead, and deserving wrath.** But God's love changes everything! **Because of God's love we are made alive, united with Christ, and live for his glory.** This is the greatest status update in the world. Many of you have already made this decision, but for others, today is the day. Today is the day that you are going to place faith in Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life that he has given you.