

How God Saves Us



SABBATH—JULY 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 2:1–10; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 1:3, 4.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God loves us deeply [so very much]. He is full of mercy. So, he gave us new life because of what Christ [Jesus] has done. He [God] gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God’s grace [mercy] has saved you” (Ephesians 2:4, 5, NIV).

ON OCTOBER 14, 1987, 18-month-old Jessica McClure played in her aunt’s backyard. Then Jessica fell down an old well and got stuck 22 feet below ground. Her story in Midland, Texas, got worldwide attention on the news. People watched “Baby Jessica” sleep, cry, sing, and ask for her mother. People watched emergency workers send fresh air down the well to Jessica.

Finally, 58 hours later, people watched on TV as the workers released Jessica from the 8-inch-wide well that trapped her for more than two days. Photographer Scott Shaw took a picture of that special moment. Later, he won a prize for the picture. In the picture, we see the worried faces of the emergency workers as they look down at Baby Jessica, who is covered in bandages.

We like to read stories about people who save other people. In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul tells us about the biggest and most exciting story of all time: how God saves humans. What makes this story more exciting is that we are not just watching someone else get saved. We are watching God save us.



People watched on TV as the workers released Jessica from the 8-inch-wide well that trapped her for more than two days.

**LIVING IN SIN AND TRICKED BY SATAN IN THE PAST
(Ephesians 2:1–10)**

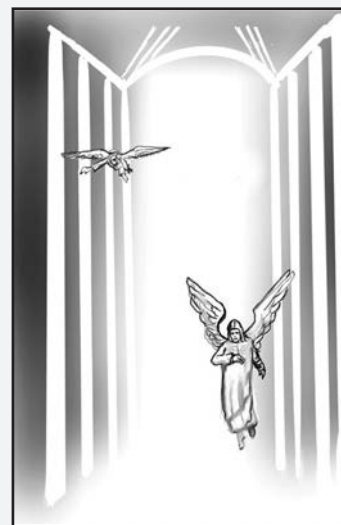
What does Paul say that Jesus did for us? Read Ephesians 2:1–10 for the answer.

Paul already talked about the gift of mercy that God gives sinners (Ephesians 1:3–14, 15–23). Paul also told us, in short, the story about the Christians in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:13). In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul now tells us more about their story and how God changed their lives after they accepted Jesus. Paul compares their old lives with their new lives. Paul talks about their past experiences as sinners (Ephesians 2:1–3). Then Paul talks about the spiritual blessings the Ephesians have in their new life (Ephesians 2:4–7) and why they are blessed (Ephesians 2:8–10). Jesus is both the One who made them and saves them. So, that is why God can show them mercy. Ephesians 2:5 has three parts: (1) we were sinners; (2) God gave us new life in Jesus; and (3) God saves us by His mercy.

In Ephesians 2:1, 2, Paul says that the Ephesians were the same as dead people before Jesus saved them. They lived as sinners (Ephesians 2:1). Satan controlled their lives (Ephesians 2:2). Of course, Paul is writing to living people. So, the word “dead” is really a word picture for the Ephesians when Satan controlled them (compare Ephesians 5:14). The danger to their lives from sin and Satan was very real. The Ephesians were separated from God in the past. Then God saved them and gave them life. God is the reason for all life (compare Colossians 2:13; Romans 5:17; Romans 6:23).

Paul talks about the two things that controlled the lives of his readers in the past. His readers were controlled by (1) the false ideas and (2) the bad behavior of the people around them (Ephesians 2:2). These two things caused Paul’s readers to fight against God in the past.

Paul says the Ephesians served Satan. Satan is “the ruler [leader] of the evil powers that are above the earth” (Ephesians 2:2, ERV). The words “above the earth” are a word picture for heaven. Bible writers saw heaven as the place where all spiritual powers or angels lived. These angels included evil angels or spirits (compare Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 3:10; Ephesians 6:12). Satan is busy on earth, as well. He works in the lives of the people who disobey God (Ephesians 2:2).



The words “above the earth” are a word picture for heaven. Bible writers saw heaven as the place where all spiritual powers or angels lived.

CONTROLLED BY OUR SINS IN THE PAST (Ephesians 2:3)

“In the past all of us lived like [the same as] them. We lived trying to please our sinful [filled with sin] selves. We did all the things our bodies and minds wanted. We should have suffered God’s anger because we were sinful by nature [because we wanted to sin]. We were the same as all other people” (Ephesians 2:3, ICB).

What does Paul mean when he says, “in the past all of us lived like them” (Ephesians 2:3, ICB)? Who is Paul talking about? Compare Ephesians 2:3 with Ephesians 5:6 to answer the question.



As sinners, we want to fight against God and destroy ourselves. Our behavior is evil.

Ephesians 2:3 helps us to understand that we are sinners. There is something wrong with us. When we become Christians, we change in every way. We don’t just stop doing one or two bad habits. We don’t just say no to whatever sin comes our way right now (Ephesians 2:1). We don’t just fight against one or two big sins. We fight with sin itself. As sinners, we want to fight against God and destroy ourselves. Our behavior is evil. Without God’s help, we will let Satan control us (Ephesians 2:2). That’s why Paul says, “We should have suffered God’s anger because we were sinful [filled with sin] by nature [because we wanted to sin]. We were the same as all other people” (Ephesians 2:3, ICB).

Do you see that Paul uses the word “were” two times in this verse, and not “are”? Paul uses “were” to show his readers that they will be in danger again if they reject God and go back to their old way of life. In Ephesians 4:17–5:21, Paul warns his readers against sin and evil behavior. Paul also gives his readers hope. Their old selves don’t need to control them anymore. With Jesus’ help, they can reject their old lives and evil behavior. They can live new, holy lives in Jesus (Ephesians 4:22–24).

We are sinners. After we give ourselves to Jesus, we must continue in His strength to fight against sin. So, we know from our own experience that without help from Jesus we will continue to do evil. What does this idea teach us about why we must hold on tight to Jesus all the time?

IN HEAVEN WITH JESUS (Ephesians 2:6, 7)

In what way do Christians have a part in Jesus' waking up from the dead, His going to heaven, and His sitting on His Father's throne? Read Ephesians 2:6, 7 for the answer.

Paul helps us understand the answer to our question above. Paul explains that God wakes Christians up from the dead with Jesus. Then Christians go with Jesus to heaven. Christians also sit down with Jesus on His throne. So, they share in Jesus' glory.

If we want to understand better what Paul says, we must look back at Ephesians 1:19–23. In these verses, Paul tells us that Jesus won the fight against evil and every spiritual power when He died, woke up from the dead, went to heaven, and sat on the throne. These evil powers are the same powers that controlled the lives of Paul's readers in the past. But now Jesus beats these evil powers because He woke up from the dead and went to heaven. Yes, these evil powers continue to put humans in danger. But now Jesus is more powerful than Satan and any of his evil angels. Everything has changed.

Jesus' win against sin is very powerful and exciting news for all Christians. The Christians in Paul's day didn't just hear about Jesus' win. They were a living part of it! That's what Paul means when he says we wake up with Jesus, we go to heaven with Him, and we sit on the throne with Him. So, now we understand that we are more than readers. We do the same as Jesus. We do wake up, go to heaven, and sit with Jesus on His throne because He made these things possible for us. Jesus made it possible for us to live a new life. We can reject Satan and a life controlled by demons. We can have new spiritual lives filled with the mercy and strength that comes from Jesus (2 Timothy 1:7).

Paul says, "God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid. He gave us a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7, ICB). How does this Bible promise help us today? How, also, does this promise help us to understand Paul's words in Ephesians 2:6, 7?



Paul tells us that Jesus won the fight against evil and every spiritual power when He died, woke up from the dead, went to heaven, and sat on the throne.

NOW BLESSED FOREVER BY MERCY (Ephesians 1:3, 4)

Compare what Paul writes about God’s saving plan in Ephesians 1:3, 4 with what Paul says about this plan in Ephesians 2:7. What are the most important parts of this plan?



God’s mercy is the same as a treasure (compare Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 3:8).

We must understand that we always will need God’s mercy. There never will come a time when we don’t need it.

In Ephesians 2:6, 7, Paul tells us about the things God did for us. God sent Jesus to save us from sin. In God’s view, we are in partnership with Jesus. We are in a partnership with Jesus when He wakes up from the dead, when He goes to heaven, and when He sits on His throne. We do these things with Jesus. Our partnership with Jesus is part of God’s plan. God made His saving plan before time started (Ephesians 1:4). God’s plan started in the past and, also, happens in the future forever. God’s plan continues “for all time to come” (Ephesians 2:7, ERV). God’s plan for the future shows us the important rule of His mercy. Everything God did in the past and does now shows us His mercy. Everything God will do in the future, also, will show us His mercy. “For all future time” God wants to show us “the very great [wonderful] riches of his grace [mercy]” (Ephesians 2:7, ICB).

Paul thinks that God’s mercy is the same as a treasure (compare Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 3:8). Christians can look to this “treasure” to help them in their time of need. God is very giving. His love for us and His unselfishness show us His mercy.

“Jesus came to live with us. Jesus showed God both to humans and to angels. That was Jesus’ special job. . . . Our little earth is the same as a lesson that teaches everyone in heaven and on all the other planets God made. Angels wish to learn about God’s saving plan and His saving love. This love is a mystery. The angels will study about this topic forever. The saved people, the holy angels, and the people on the other planets will study about Jesus. All of them will see that the glory that shines from Jesus’ face is His love. This love caused Jesus to die for us on the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 19, 20, adapted.

NOW SAVED BY GOD (Ephesians 2:1–10)

Read Ephesians 2:1–10 again. Pay special attention to verses 8–10. What important ideas does Paul talk about at the end of these verses?

In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul’s message to his readers, and to us, is that God saves us because He loves us. God doesn’t save us because of our own good behavior. God saves us by His Son Jesus (Ephesians 2:4, 5). God saves us because of His mercy. God wakes us up from spiritual death. Because of God’s mercy, we are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer “dead.” After God wakes us up from spiritual death, He shows us His mercy. In His eyes, His children go with Jesus to heaven and sit with Jesus on heaven’s throne (Ephesians 2:5, 6). This blessing is not just for a moment or instant. This blessing of being with Jesus continues for all time. God will show His mercy to His children in Jesus, now and forever (Ephesians 2:7).

At the end of Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul says the same thing again. That’s because Paul wants to make sure his readers understand. God saves us because of His mercy, not because of our good behavior. That’s why God’s mercy is a gift. We can’t earn it. (Read Ephesians 2:8–10.) We can’t save ourselves (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We can come to God only because Jesus made that possible. When we accept Jesus and give our lives to God, we show God’s mercy, not our own good behavior. We are God’s own works of art. God made us new because of Jesus Christ, His Son (Ephesians 2:10).

Why is it so important for us to understand that we are saved by God and His mercy and not by our own good behavior?



God saves us because He loves us.



**God gives His Holy Spirit to His people.
This gift is a promise
(Ephesians 1:13, 14).**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul often gives hint of a special story. This story is about God's plan to save His people from sin. The story has six main parts:

1. God chose to save His people from sin. God made a plan to save them. He made this plan before He made the earth and skies (Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11).
2. Before God's people accepted Jesus, they were lost in sin. Their past lives were evil (Ephesians 2:1–3, 11, 12; Ephesians 4:17–19, 22; Ephesians 5:8).
3. God sent Jesus to save His people (Ephesians 1:7, 8; Ephesians 2:4–6, 13–19; Ephesians 4:1, 20, 21; Ephesians 5:2, 8, 23, 25, 26).
4. God's people accept the Good News that Jesus saves them from their sins (Ephesians 1:12, 13 and other verses). In the past, God's people had no hope (Ephesians 2:12). Now they have hope in Jesus for a better life now and for everlasting life in the future (Ephesians 4:4; compare Ephesians 1:18).
5. God's children are not only His family; they are, also, His followers. As God's followers, His people have lived in times filled with danger and risk, when evil powers tried to hurt them. God gives us His mercy and other gifts in our time of need (Ephesians 1:15–23; Ephesians 2:6; Ephesians 3:14–21; Ephesians 4:7–16; Ephesians 6:10–20).
6. God gives His Holy Spirit to His people. This gift is a promise (Ephesians 1:13, 14) that God will give His people everything else He promised them (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit is the same as a mark (Ephesians 4:30). In the future, God will reward His followers for their faith (Ephesians 2:7; Ephesians 6:8, 9). Because God's followers believe in Jesus, they will be citizens in His new kingdom in the future (Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 2:7, 19–22; Ephesians 4:13, 15; Ephesians 5:27).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① The story that we see in Ephesians is about the Christians in Paul's time. Their story is our story, too. Which parts of the story above give you the most hope right now?
- ② Compare Paul's explanation of the Good News in Ephesians 2:8–10 to his earlier explanation in Romans 1:16, 17. What is the same about both? How are the two different?
- ③ Our good behavior can't save us. But why is our good behavior important? Read Ephesians 2:10 for the answer.

PART 1: SCARED IN RUSSIA

Strange things started to happen at home after 16-year-old Almira signed up for a class on how to communicate with spirits and control them. Almira lived in the country of Bashkortostan. Bashkortostan is part of a group of countries known as Russia, which used to be part of the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, religion was not legal.

In 1991, the Soviet Union broke apart. At that time, the Russian people started to become interested in learning about religion. In 1992, two Russians from Moscow came to Almira's school in the city of Sibay. These Russians offered to teach classes on how to know things without using our five senses. Our senses include sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

Almira's parents refused to allow Almira to go to these classes.

The two Russian teachers promised to teach the children amazing secrets. One secret included how to heal people who were sick. For a long time, Almira's mother suffered terrible headaches. Almira wanted to help her mother feel better. So, Almira went to the classes in secret. The two teachers taught Almira that good and evil forces were all around her. Almira could not see them. But if she learned to control these forces, she could use their power to do miracles.

When Almira was at home alone, she practiced the things she learned in the class. She started to talk to the spirits in her home. She told the spirits she wanted to control them.

That night, Almira turned off the light to go to bed. She then felt that someone or something was in the room with her.

After a while, something started to appear during the day when she was at home alone. Sometimes she saw a shadow run past her house window. Almira was not afraid. She thought she was strong and was learning how to control the spirits.

As time passed, Almira understood that the spirit was stronger than she was. So, Almira couldn't control the spirit.

Now Almira was scared. She stopped turning off the lights when she went to bed at night. She was afraid to sleep. When she finally fell asleep, she had very bad dreams. Almira asked Mother to sleep next to her. Mother agreed but then stopped sleeping next to her daughter after a few days. Mother said she started having bad dreams, too.

For the next six months, Almira's life was awful. She got bad grades in school. She fought with teachers, friends, and her parents all the time. Almira grew very afraid. She didn't know what to do.

Read more about Almira next week. Thank you for your offerings that help our church share the Good News about Jesus in Russia and around the globe.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Almira wanted to help her mother feel better.

