

Ephesians 2:1-10 – Salvation by Faith Alone

How can we know that we are right with God?

It's the most important question we can ask, and it at the heart of the Reformation. When he was a law student, Luther was returning home when, he was caught up in a huge thunderstorm. As the lightning flashed and thunder clapped, Luther was terrified. Luther was very devout; he was convinced that God was behind the thunderstorm, unleashing his fury on Luther for his many sins. Because Luther was a Catholic, and he knew his saints, he called out to St Anne, 'O help me, St Anne, and I will become a monk'. The date was June 1505, and Luther was as good as his vow -- 2 weeks later Luther withdrew from his law studies, and entered the monastery.

But during his early days as a monk, Luther had a terribly troubled conscience; and he tried to deal with it with religious zeal and performance: "If any monk ever got to heaven by monkery, then I should have made it." But it didn't work; Luther was miserable.

Luther was trapped by this logic:

1 Luther knew God is perfect; 2 Luther knew He was a sinner; 3 Luther thought that he could deal with his sins himself by doing religious things; 4 But those things made no difference

It's a bit like Strictly....

Luther was a bit like Gemma and Aljaz, or Debbie and Giovanni, working flat out each week to get their foxtrots and Paso dobles just right so that Shirley, Craig, Darcie, and Bruno will score them high marks. So Luther was doing all his religious devotion as a monk just to see if God would be impressed enough to overlook his sins.

But it didn't work. So Luther was miserable.

Luther's salvation came in 1518. He realised that, rather than God expecting him to meet a standard of perfection he could never attain, rather, God gives that perfection as a gift, through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's like this video. This video has my name on it. Imagine it has everything on it - what I've done; But it's also got the things I've said; and, all the things I've thought. It's everything - unedited. There would be good stuff - voluntary work I'd done; PhD; playing in church; concerts; walks; but bad stuff too - stuff I wouldn't want you to know about me. Imagine, when I die, God is deciding whether to let me into heaven. So, it's played. I'd be ashamed; it would be enough to prove that, for all the good things I've done, I fail to meet God's perfect standard.

What would be on your video? Wouldn't you be ashamed if God were to judge you on it? Luther knew what was on his video, and it terrified him. He knew he couldn't change it. And so he spent his life as a monk before God, trying to make up for the bad stuff, in the hope God would accept him.

But...

Here's another tape. It's got Jesus's name on it. Now, would what be on that video? Jesus is the only perfect man who ever lived. He always loved God and others. Never thought or said anything wrong. He was never unkind.

Now, Luther's discovery was this. That if I believe in Jesus, then this happens: [tape swapped]

- on the one hand, in his death, Jesus is punished for all the wrong things I had done; God judged Jesus instead of me - that's what happened at the Cross

- and, all of Jesus' perfect life gets credited to me. So, God treats me *as though I am Jesus*.

In one step, once, for all time, I am made perfectly right God

And when Luther understood it, 'I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise'

But is this taught in the Bible? Yes, in Ephesians 2. **The message of these verses is: Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God**

Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God

It has to be faith alone. Our works don't work, Because, firstly,

i) By nature we are completely dead to God (1-3)

Verses 1 - 3 describe what the Ephesians *were*, before they were Christians. And this is true for us too. They describe *why* our work's can never save us:

First, we are **dead to God**. see v. 1. The point of this is that naturally we are unresponsive to God. Why? Because, v.1, of our 'transgressions and sins'.

Voice-recognition software exists for security - the idea is that because our voices are unique, software will only respond to our voice. HSBC have used it. Imagine you had that on your account; I could try ringing up, but your account won't respond to my voice - it's only trained to respond to yours. We were designed to respond to God, to Him, to his voice. But our hearts have been rewired so that they can't respond to His voice anymore, they are dead to Him. Rather, the one voice that our hearts naturally always respond to is *our own voice*. And we love that voice; so when we're deciding how to run our lives, what God might want doesn't even figure; but we will fight tooth and nail for we what we want to do.

We're spiritually unable to do things to please God; because naturally we are dead to Him; but there is another - naturally, we are not just dead to God...we are **enslaved** - vvs 2 and 3 say we are enslaved to three things:

to the 'ways of this world'; naturally we don't follow God; we just follow the crowd

to the devil - v.2 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air'; - the devil

and to our sinful natures - inside each of us is a nature that is pre-programmed to go its own way, v3 -naturally we are able only to 'gratify the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts'.

This is why even good works can't make us right - Because God is good, perfect, lovely, we should do all that we do for Him - to please Him, to bring Him joy, because we care about Him. But we're being told here that we are unable to do that - if we're dead to God, we are unresponsive to God - we're not moved by Him, or what He wants;

if we're wired to please ourselves - then even good stuff, the motive is wrong - it's all about us. We give money not really to bless someone else, but just to make ourselves feel better. We pray/go to church/live not because we love God, but out of fear - just to put Him in a position where He now has to bless us.

Do you see why that falls short? Life should be about God, but it's all about us. Rather, we reject God.

So, what is the result? We are **condemned**, v 3: 'like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath' - We're in no position to be blessed; rather, God's attitude to us is one of hostility, anger.

So, if nothing we do can make us right with God - it has to be through faith.

Before we go on, what are we to do with it?

Firstly, religion cannot make you right with God. You've been coming to church for a long time, out of duty. Maybe you've sung in the choir, even served the PCC or on coffee, but somehow its not real to you, and you wonder why. Well, the first thing you need to hear today is that none of those things can make you right with God. There is a deeper problem that they can't change. You need to tire of those things.

But maybe you think: 'I wish I had faith'; how do I get it? If by nature, we are dead to God, it means that if want to have real faith we have to stop trying, and go to God for it. We have to ask him for it. That might sounds strange, even illogical – but it's not. For, actually, the desire to have faith is itself a first step of faith, the stirrings of spiritual sensitivity and a sign that God is at work. So go with it. Go to Him, ask Him to strengthen and deepen your faith in Christ.

Christian –

These verses speak of the *past* of a believer. It is the *past* that is marked by spiritual deadness, by slavery to sin, and by condemnation. To me this raises a natural challenge for you as a Christian – are you going back? How is your spiritual life today? Are you less spiritually alive than you were, are you allowing some deadness and coldness to creep in? And sin – Christ has set us free, but are you living enslaved? Falling back into conscious, deliberate sin? You don't need tom and there is a way back.

Also, Christian, if it's going well for you, don't be proud of what you do. Perhaps, as Garry said, you are one of the few who does lots - well, your faith is not of your doing; so be humble. No-one is indispensable.

Remember **Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God**; it has to be by faith, because, **firstly, by nature we are completely dead to God.**

But it also has to be by faith because secondly,

ii) By faith in Christ, God makes us completely alive (4-7)

Look in more detail at verses 4-7. These verses explain what the Ephesians are now. Note that they *reverse* the three points in 1 - 3, in the same order. When you become a Christian, this is what happens:

- instead of being dead, we are now alive - in Christ (4, 5)

So, we become spiritually responsive to God. Suddenly, what He wants matters; we *love* him for who he is;

- instead of being enslaved to the world, flesh, devil, we are now free and safe - with Christ (6)

Christians are *raised* with Christ, in the *heavenly realms* (6). The point is that we are now *safe* from the clutches of the devil, or of any other harmful spiritual power.

- instead of being objects of wrath before God, we are blessed by Him - God treats us with kindness (7)

We are free to enjoy blessing from God. We can know His kindness, rather than (v3) his wrath.

The point is that all of this, v7, is 'in Christ' - He is enough. Nothing else needed.

ii) By faith in Christ, God makes us completely alive (4-6)

Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God (1-10)

Two groups of people

i) You can be right with God - are you?

If you want to be, you have to let go of your attempts to be good. To stop trying.

I was flying the other week to Spain. And sitting next to the wing. Dave joked to me that if the plane crashed, I'd have to open the door. And I get a bit anxious flying over water. Now, what would happen? The plane would go down, the oxygen masks would fall, you'd reach under your seat and hope the lifejacket really was stowed there! But what about all your stuff? Well, you know the rules - Handbags, rucksacks, laptops? You have to leave them. Why? Those yellow lifejackets are small - they're not going to support you if you've got a rucksack and a laptop strapped to your back - you'll sink! Letting go of your baggage – it's for your safety, your survival! If you don't want to drown, you have to abandon yourself to your lifejacket.

Its the same with Christ. Jesus death is enough for all your sins; everything you've done wrong; Jesus' perfect life - that's enough to cover you in all your imperfections. God doesn't ask anything more. Jesus is your lifejacket...But if you're going to be safe, well you just have to trust him, but that means abandoning the other things - abandon yourself to Him.

You have to let go of your goodness and abandon yourself to Christ.

There will be a chance to respond to this at the end. Are you still hoping that God will accept you because of your goodness, your service? Turn away from those, and put your trust in Christ.

Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God (1-10)

ii) Christian, are you still just living by faith alone?

Easy to start basing our relationship with God on our own performance. So, if things are going well, we feel we can come to God. But if things aren't, well we worry it's our fault, and we're more tentative when we come to Him. Or, like Luther, we worry that bad stuff that's happening might be God showing his anger at us. Christian, hear the encouragement that Christ has done everything to make God pleased with you today. The best illustration is the slate. We talk about 'wiping the slate clean'. And so, with God, we imagine that as we go through our lives, there's a slate that he keeps a track on, and the bad stuff we do gets on their, and the good stuff we try and do as Christians, that goes on there too. And what happens when we confess, is God rubs off the bad stuff, we start again. Christ is enough - so, what happens is when we turn to Christ the first time, its as if God breaks the slate - not needed. Because Christ's death and life have already turned God's face to you. So, He loves you just as completely on the bad days as well as the good days. His love for you doesn't change with your performance. And if He's putting you through hard things, He's not punishing you, rather he wants to know his kindness today.

Through faith alone in the finished work of Christ, You can be right with God (1-10)

First, by nature we are completely dead to God

By faith in Christ He makes us completely alive.

Tie to respond....

- Do you need to come to Christ
 - Turn away from your works? Ask Christ to make you right?
 - Christian, come to God who loves you? For comfort?
 - Christian, struggling with sin, ask for Jesus' help this week?