

# Death to Life

## Eph 2:4-6

### Pierre Cannings, Ph.D.

#### I. Mercy and Love (v. 4)

- a. But God
  - i. “but God...” The adversative ὁὲ introduces a contrasting situation brought about because of who God is and what he has done.
  - ii. An implicit νῦν, “now,” can be seen as part of this contrast with the ποτέ, “once,” of vv 2, 3. There is now in existence a whole new situation because of God’s initiative.
- b. Rich in Mercy Eph 1:7
  - i. Rich - to being plentifully supplied with
  - ii. Mercy- - kindness or concern expressed for someone in need, *mercy, compassion, pity, clemency*
    - 1. God’s ἔλεος is often thought of in the original OT sense of “faithfulness,” i.e., the gracious faithfulness of God
    - 2. LXX ἔλεος, “mercy,” normally represents the term τὸν, *hesed*, which frequently denotes *Yahweh*’s steadfast covenant loyalty and love, including the mercy of forgiveness when Israel is unfaithful to the covenant. God’s mercy is his overflowing active compassion and is freely exercised, excluding all ideas of merit on the part of its object. It is noticeable that the notion of God’s mercy is a prominent present element in several examples of the contrast between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present (cf. Rom 11:30–32; 1 Tim 1:13; Titus 3:3–5; 1 Pet 2:10).
    - 3. If unbelievers were once dead in sin, under the power of evil supernatural beings, controlled by their own wicked desires and subject to God’s wrath, they could expect no mercy from God, yet (ὁὲ) surprisingly, that is not so for God is rich in mercy. Thus the anacoluthon of vv. 2, 3 not only elaborates v. 1 but also sets off more strongly the contrast appearing with v. 4.
    - 4. This initiative is launched because God is a God not only of righteous wrath (v 3) but also of mercy. ὧν here is a circumstantial participle rather than an attributive one—“being rich in mercy” or “because he is rich in mercy.” For no other reason than his mercy, God has rescued men and women from death and given them life. In fact he is “rich in mercy.” An equivalent Hebrew description is used of *Yahweh* in, for example, Exod 34:6 and Ps 145:8. In the

- c. Great Love John 3:16
  - i. Great- to being high on a scale of extent
  - ii. Loved Us
    - 1. The other major motive cited for God's initiative in saving his people is his attitude of love.  $\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}$  plus the accusative of words for emotion indicates motivation. The writer also uses a cognate accusative expression to reinforce his thought—"the great love with which he loved us" (cf. 1:6; 1:19, 20; 4:1, which also employ cognate nouns and verbs). Just as the richness of God's mercy has been stressed, so here is the greatness of his love. Again it is Romans among Paul's letters which provides examples of his reflection on God's love for his people demonstrated in Christ (cf. 5:5, 8; 8:39). As in Romans 5:8
    - 2. Ephesians the love of God will be shown to have its focus in the love of Christ, which led to his death on behalf of his people (cf. 5:2, 25).

## II. Dead (v. 5) Ephesians 2:1

- a. Dead
  - i. Dead
    - 1. to being so morally or spiritually deficient as to be in effect dead
      - a. pertaining to being unable to respond to any impulse or to perform some function—'unable, ineffective, dead, powerless
    - 2. "the passions of the flesh" echoes the language of Gal 5:16, 24, in the context of which Paul contrasted life in the Spirit and its fruit with life in the flesh and its works (cf. also Rom 7:5; 13:14).
    - 3. Flesh, in such a context, stands not simply for a person's physical existence, but for the sphere of humanity in its sinfulness and opposition to God. It is the sphere in which a person not only displeases God but is also in fact incapable of pleasing God (cf. Rom 8:8). It is the sphere in which life is lived in pursuit of one's own ends and in independence of God.
      - a. As those whose lives were characterized by disobedience, the readers of this letter were once under the control of the sphere of the flesh. Its desires dominated their lives and had to be fulfilled. Sin pervaded their whole person so that there were no inner recesses untainted by it. Even their thoughts ( $\tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \delta\iota\alpha\nu\omicron\iota\acute{\omega}\nu$ ) were corrupt and controlled their actions.
  - ii. Our Transgressions 2:2-3
    - 1. Transgressions
      - a. ordinarily of offenses against God

- b. This is a Hebraism, like “sons of disobedience” in v 2, which means they were deserving of and liable to wrath.
  - c. it refers directly to the disruption of man’s relation to God through his fault
- 2. Formerly Walked
  - a. Lust
- 3. Course of the World
- 4. Prince of Power of the Air

### III. **Alive (v. 6)**

#### a. Alive

- i. - *make alive together with someone* to cause someone to rise up or wake up with another
  - 1. In distinction from the reference to having been made alive with Christ in Col 2:13, in Ephesians there are no preceding references to participation in Christ’s death (cf. the circumcision of Christ, Col 2:11) or his burial (Col 2:12). But, in Colossians, having been made alive with Christ is closely associated with the following notions of forgiveness of sins and liberation from cosmic powers. Since sins and bondage to an evil supernatural power are present in the depiction of death in Eph 2:1–3, it could well be that forgiveness and liberation are implicit here also in the rescue act of making alive.
  - 2. In Col 2:13 being made alive with Christ is explained as the forgiveness of sin and the cancellation of the legal bond; Eph 2:6 explains it through a change of imagery which relates it to the resurrection and ascension
  - 3. The new life must have begun at some point, as is indicated here (cf Col 2:13) by the use of the aorist. Paul, of course, uses the aorist in respect of justification (Rom 5:1, 9; 8:30; 1 Cor 6:11).
  - 4. What we have here must have arisen independently, for the death is one existing from the time of birth, is one in sin (see v. 1) not one with Christ. There is much in the NT e.g. the new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) or the concept of the new birth, testifying to the present new life of believers
- ii. Together in Christ
  - 1. Paul’s statement that in Christ all shall be made alive, he explains the stages of this event of being made alive, starting with Christ as the firstfruits. Clearly, Christ’s being made alive meant also for the writer of Ephesians the resurrection and exaltation, as the next two verbs in v 6 confirm.
  - 2. referring to living with Christ at the Parousia or after death and to sharing his glory (cf. 1 Thess 4:14, 17; 5:10; Rom 6:8; 8:17; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 1:23; Col 3:4).

3. “With Christ” language is found in connection with two aspects of sharing that death—sharing in it as an event of the past, a death to the old order and its powers, sometimes with explicitly baptismal overtones (cf. Rom 6:4, 5, 6, 8; Gal 2:19; Col 2:12, 20; 3:1), and sharing in its aspect of present suffering (cf. Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10).
4. Salvation for those whose plight is spiritual death must involve a raising to life. This is in fact what God has accomplished for believers. He made them alive with Christ. At this point also, Ephesians is reminiscent of Colossians. After the statement in Col 2:13 about the readers being dead through trespasses and the mention of the uncircumcision of their flesh (not taken up by Ephesians until 2:11), there follows the assertion that God made them alive together with Christ,

b. Grace have been saved Acts 15:11

i. Grace

1. Instead, it most frequently refers to the favor one person finds in the eyes of another. The noun which corresponds most closely to the semantic range of the verb  $\mu\eta$  is in fact  $\tau\omicron\eta$ , *hesed*, denoting overwhelming and unexpected kindness
2. The reality and generosity of grace is appreciated all the more after a statement which shows how seriously God takes human sinfulness, deeming it to be deserving of his wrath (v 3). And from the human standpoint, the necessity of an intervention of grace is underlined when set in contrast to the bankruptcy and doom of a humanity left to itself, left to what it is “by nature” (v 3).
3. It draws their attention to the divine initiative, the definite accomplishment and the continuing reality involved in having been made alive together with Christ. Their new situation has been brought about by grace. In line with Paul’s theologically rich use of the term  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ , “grace,” the writer asserts that salvation has been freely given by God to the readers as undeserving sinners.

ii. Saved

1. The idea that believers’ experience of salvation is totally unmerited on their part and due solely to God’s generosity will be expressed again in the mention of his love, and particularly through the term “grace,” which is synonymous with “mercy” and provides the keynote for the latter part of the passage in vv 5, 7, 8.
2. To save” here is an inclusive term characterizing God’s acts of making alive, raising up, and seating with Christ as a deliverance from the plight of the old situation to all the benefits of the new. The perfect tense draws attention to the continuing effects of that rescue act for the present, is in line with the surrounding aorists

and the realized eschatology of vv 5, 6, and will be balanced by the future perspective of v 7.

3. it points to the special nature of God's saving action as one of gratuitous generosity to an undeserving sinful humanity

c. Raised Colossians 2:12

i. Up with Him

1. This speaks of their being positionally resurrected. Christ's post-resurrection state was new, powerful, and unique. So too Christians, in whom Christ dwells, have a new, powerful, and unique life and position. This new life, power, and position demand that believers have a new set of values, as Paul stated in his companion letter to the Colossian believers: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1–2).
2. for a literal rendering could either be interpreted as 'to be raised to life at the same time with' or 'to be raised to life in the same way as,' but the reference in Col 3:1 and Eph 2:5 is to a spiritual existence more than to a literal resurrection of the body
3. The transfer of believers from the death of sin and the realm of the devil is expressed more strongly in v. 6 than elsewhere in the NT when it is said that believers have sat down with Christ in the heavenlies. In other places their reign is set in the future (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5; cf 1 Cor 6:2f; 1 Pet 2:9; Mt 13:43; Rom 8:17, 30).

d. Seated us with Him Ephesians 1:20

i. In Heavenly Places

1. While Christ was raised physically (1:20), unbelievers are made alive and raised with Christ spiritually (2:5–6). Christ is seated in the heavenly realms physically (in His resurrected, ascended body; 1:20), but believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms spiritually (2:6). This divine power that can make an unbeliever have life, be raised, and exalted with Christ is the same power that presently operates in believers
2. Believers are positioned spiritually in heaven, where Christ is. They are no longer mere earthlings; their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). He is the exalted Son of God, and they are exalted sons and daughters of God.

ii. In Christ Jesus

1. The notion of resurrection with Christ is not, of course, unique to Ephesians and is found in Col 2:12 and 3:1
2. Believers are seen as included in Christ, so what God accomplished for Christ he accomplished for him as the representative, the head of a new humanity. Since "with Christ,"

which is the force of the *συν* prefix, and “in Christ Jesus” both suggest a relationship of solidarity, the combination of the two in v 6 is again characteristic of Ephesians’ redundancy of style for the sake of emphasis. Certainly the intimate union between Christ and believers is given heavy stress in v 6. 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.

3. Passages such as Rom 4:17 and 8:11, where ζῶσσοιμεν is used of future bodily resurrection, remind us that, with the use of the compound in the aorist tense here, the writer is talking about an experience of the resurrection life of the end-time ahead of time

# Word Studies

- a. Rich in Mercy Eph 1:7
  - i. Rich - **to being plentifully supplied with**<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. **Mercy - kindness or concern expressed for someone in need, *mercy, compassion, pity, clemency***<sup>2</sup>
    - 1. God's ἔλεος is often thought of in the original O<sup>3</sup>T sense of "faithfulness," i.e., the gracious faithfulness of God<sup>4</sup>
- b. Great Love John 3:16
  - i. Great - **to being high on a scale of extent**<sup>5</sup>
- c. Dead
  - i. **Dead- to being so morally or spiritually deficient as to be in effect dead**<sup>6</sup>
    - 1. pertaining to being unable to respond to any impulse or to perform some function—'unable, ineffective, dead, powerless.'  
ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ 'we who were dead because of our sins, (God) brought to life through Christ' Eph 2:5. Since the reference in Eph 2:5 (see also Eph 2:1) is to matters relating to God, one may translate 'we who were unable to respond to matters relating to God because of our sins ...' or 'we who were spiritually dead'<sup>7</sup>
  - ii. Our Transgressions 2:2-3
    - 1. Transgression ordinarily of offenses against God<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 831.

<sup>2</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 316.

<sup>3</sup>OT Old Testament.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, [\*"Ἐλεος, Ἐλέω, Ἐλεήμων, Ἐλεημοσύνη, Ἀέλεος, Ἀελεήμων,"\*](#) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 483.

<sup>5</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 849.

<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 667.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains\*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 678.

<sup>8</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 770.

- a. however, goes further; it refers directly to the disruption of man's relation to God through his fault.<sup>9</sup>
  - 2. Formerly Walked
    - a. Lust
  - 3. Course of the World
  - 4. Prince of Power of the Air
- II. Alive
  - a. Alive- **make alive together with someone**<sup>10</sup> to cause someone to rise up or wake up with another,<sup>11</sup>
    - i. There are serious semantic difficulties involved in a literal translation of συνεγείρω or συζωοποιέω, for a literal rendering could either be interpreted as 'to be raised to life at the same time with' or 'to be raised to life in the same way as,' but the reference in Col 3:1 and Eph 2:5 is to a spiritual existence more than to a literal resurrection of the body.<sup>12</sup>
    - ii. Together in Christ
  - b. Grace have been saved Acts 15:11
  - c. Raised Colossians 2:12
    - i. Up with Him
  - d. Seated us with Him Ephesians 1:20
    - i. Seated - **cause to sit down with**
    - ii. In Heavenly Places
    - iii. In Christ Jesus

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "Πίπτω, Πτώμα, Πτώσις, Ἐκπίπτω, Καταπίπτω, Παραπίπτω, Παράπτωμα, Περιπίπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 172.

<sup>10</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 954.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive, Συναποθνήσκω, Συσταυρόω, Συνθάπτω, Σύμφυτος, Συνεγείρω, Συζάω, Συζωοποιέω, Συμπάσχω, Συνδοξάζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 787.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 262.





## Commentary Studies

ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν, ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, “in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the wishes of the flesh and the thoughts.” The major characteristic of the past sinful way of life that is now taken up is its orientation to the flesh. The term “flesh” occurs elsewhere in this letter in 2:11, 14; 5:29, 31; 6:5, 12. But only here, where it occurs twice in the same verse, does it have the negative ethical connotations distinctive of a large number of its uses in Paul. It should not be surprising that such connotations pertain here, since the expression “the passions of the flesh” echoes the language of Gal 5:16, 24, in the context of which Paul contrasted life in the Spirit and its fruit with life in the flesh and its works (cf. also Rom 7:5; 13:14). Flesh, in such a context, stands not simply for a person’s physical existence, but for the sphere of humanity in its sinfulness and opposition to God. It is the sphere in which a person not only displeases God but is also in fact incapable of pleasing God (cf. Rom 8:8). It is the sphere in which life is lived in pursuit of one’s own ends and in independence of God. As such, it is not limited to indulgence in sensuality but can take on various forms, including allegiance to the law (cf. Gal 3:3). (On “flesh” in Paul cf. especially R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 1 [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951] 232–46; E. Schweizer, “σάρξ,” *TDN*<sup>13</sup>T 7 [1971] 98–151; R. Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971] 49–166; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 93–104; H. Seebass and A. C. Thiselton, “Flesh,” *NIDNT*<sup>14</sup>T 1 [1975] 671–82; A. Sand, *Der Begriff “Fleisch” in den paulinischen Hauptbriefen* [Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1967].)

As those whose lives were characterized by disobedience, the readers of this letter were once under the control of the sphere of the flesh. Its desires dominated their lives and had to be fulfilled. Sin pervaded their whole person so that there were no inner recesses untainted by it. Even their thoughts (τῶν διανοιῶν) were corrupt and controlled their actions. It has been suggested that the plural of δiάνoia means senses or impulses, with LX<sup>15</sup>X Num 15:39 cited in support (cf. BAG<sup>16</sup>D 187). But there appear to be no grounds for such an interpretation. The plural of the noun should be translated, as one might expect, as “thoughts, dispositions, imaginations.” The context will indicate whether such thoughts are seen as good or evil. This holds true of LX<sup>17</sup>X Num 15:39. By making “thoughts” a separate category parallel to “flesh” in the clause “carrying out the wishes of the flesh, and the thoughts,” however, the writer may well be moving away slightly from Pauline usage, where the sphere of the flesh embraces the

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<sup>13</sup>TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

<sup>14</sup>NIDNTT C. Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary, of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–78)

<sup>15</sup>LXX Septuagint

<sup>16</sup>BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ET, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; 2d ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago, 1979)

<sup>17</sup>LXX Septuagint

thoughts as well as the senses (cf. the mind-set of the flesh in Rom 8:5–7 or the mind of the flesh in Col 2:18), and beginning to confine “flesh” to the sensual (cf. also Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 113; Percy [*Probleme*, 261–62] attempts to explain this as a stylistic variation but does not really meet the point that such a variation still leaves the reader with the distinction between flesh and thought).

καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί, “and we were by nature children of wrath like the rest.” When they once lived their lives in such total absorption with the flesh, the writer and all believers were τέκνα ... ὀργῆς, “children of wrath.” This is a Hebraism, like “sons of disobedience” in v 2, which means they were deserving of and liable to wrath. This wrath is clearly God’s wrath (cf. Eph 5:6; also Col 3:5, 6) rather than merely an impersonal process of cause and effect or a principle of retribution in a moral universe. The wrath of God is a concept which occurs frequently in Paul’s letter to the Romans. It refers to God’s active judgment going forth against all forms of sin and evil and is evidence of his absolute holiness (cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4, 5). The Hebraistic expression used here in Eph 2:3 reminds one of the way in which in the OT a person deserving of punishment is spoken of as a “son of stripes” (Deut 25:2) or a person doomed to die is spoken of as a “son of death” (cf. 1 Sam 26:16; 2 Sam 12:5; Ps 102:20). It is also reminiscent of the way in which in apocalyptic literature Cain, in being marked out for judgment, is described as a “son of wrath” (Apoc<sup>18</sup>. Mos. 3). In the NT also, Jesus is represented as condemning the proselytizing of the Pharisees, declaring that when they made a convert he was twice as much a “son of Gehenna” as they themselves (Matt 23:15). The children of wrath, then, are those who are doomed to God’s wrath because through their condition of sinful rebellion, they deserve his righteous judgment.

As does Paul in Rom 1:18–3:20 the writer makes this category cover all humanity outside Christ. ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί means “like the rest of humanity,” and in this way the sinful condition and its consequences, which the writer has been describing, become all-embracing in their extent. What was once true of the readers (vv 1, 2) was also once true of all believers (v 3a) and what was once true of all believers is also true of the rest of humanity (v 3b).

The human condition of being destined to judgment in the day of God’s wrath is a condition that is “by nature.” What is the force of the term φύσει here? Elsewhere the noun φύσις can refer to the natural order of things (cf. Rom 1:26; 1 Cor 11:14) but the actual expression φύσει in the dative, “by nature,” occurs elsewhere in the NT in Gal 2:15 “we who are Jews by nature,” where it refers to that which comes through birth rather than that which is acquired later (cf. also ἐκ φύσεως in Rom 2:27) in Gal 4:8, where it means “in reality,” and in Rom 2:14, 15, where it means “of one’s own free will, voluntarily, independently.” φύσει in Eph 2:3 belongs with the first of these uses (cf. also A. Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und das NT* [Giessen: Töpelmann 1911] 146–54; BAG<sup>19</sup>D 869; Barth, 231; *contr*<sup>20</sup>a Gnika 117). So, in their natural condition, through birth, men and women are “children of wrath.”

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<sup>18</sup>Apoc. Apocrypha

<sup>19</sup>BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ET, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; 2d ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago, 1979)

<sup>20</sup>*contra* in contrast to

Some commentators (e.g. J. A. Robinson 50–51; Gnllka 117; Barth, 231) wish to dissociate the thought expressed in this verse from any notion of original sin. (On the history of interpretation of this verse in connection with that doctrine, as seen mainly from a Catholic perspective, see Mehlmann’s Latin monograph, *Natura filii Irae*.) But if original sin refers to the innate sinfulness of human nature inherited from Adam in consequence of the fall, then such a notion is not entirely alien to the thought of this verse when it speaks of the impossibility of humanity of itself, in its natural condition, escaping God’s wrath. To be sure, the verse does not explicitly teach original sin by making a statement about how this tragic plight came to be humanity’s natural condition. Yet the idea of the natural condition in which one finds oneself by birth being a sinful state deserving of God’s judgment surely presupposes some such view of original sin as is found in Rom 5:12–21, where Paul recognizes that, as well as sinning themselves, men and women, in solidarity with Adam, inherit a sinful situation by sharing in the one sin of the one man (cf. also Schlier 107; BAG<sup>21</sup>D 869, where Eph 2:3 is translated “we were, in our natural condition [as descendants of Adam], children of wrath.”) “By nature” should not of course be taken to mean that sinfulness is of the essence of human nature. In Pauline thought sin is always abnormal, a disorder, but in a fallen world the natural condition of human beings involves experience of that abnormality and disorder. In this sense, Eph 2:1–10 contains a contrast between nature and grace, between fallen human existence in and of itself and the divine initiative required if human life is to be restored to what it was meant to be.

4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, “But God being rich in mercy, out of his great love with which he loved us.” Here the writer begins to return to the thought begun in v 1 but interrupted by his expansion on what it means to be dead through trespasses and sins in vv 2, 3. He has seen clearly the hopeless condition of humanity in sin and painted it in dark colors. Yet the explanation for the overall mood of the first part of the letter being one of praise and thanksgiving to God rather than despair is summed up by the eloquent little phrase at the start of v 4, ὁ δὲ θεός ..., “but God....” The adversative δὲ introduces a contrasting situation brought about because of who God is and what he has done. An implicit νῦν, “now,” can be seen as part of this contrast with the ποτέ, “once,” of vv 2, 3. There is now in existence a whole new situation because of God’s initiative.

This initiative is launched because God is a God not only of righteous wrath (v 3) but also of mercy. ὢν here is a circumstantial participle rather than an attributive one—“being rich in mercy” or “because he is rich in mercy.” For no other reason than his mercy, God has rescued men and women from death and given them life. In fact he is “rich in mercy.” An equivalent Hebrew description is used of Yahweh in, for example, Exod 34:6 and Ps 145:8. In the LX<sup>22</sup>X ἔλεος, “mercy,” normally represents the term *ῥεσέδ*, which frequently denotes *Yahweh’s* steadfast covenant loyalty and love, including the mercy of forgiveness when Israel is unfaithful to the covenant. God’s mercy is his overflowing active compassion and is freely exercised, excluding all ideas of merit on the part of its object. It is noticeable that the notion of God’s mercy is a prominent present element in several examples of the contrast between the

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<sup>21</sup>BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ET, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; 2d ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago, 1979)

<sup>22</sup>LXX Septuagint

pre-Christian past and the Christian present (cf. Rom 11:30–32; 1 Tim 1:13; Titus 3:3–5; 1 Pet 2:10). It plays an important part in the apostle Paul’s thinking about God’s relationship to humanity in Rom 9–11 in particular (cf. 9:15, 16, 18, 23; 11:30, 31, 32). The idea that believers’ experience of salvation is totally unmerited on their part and due solely to God’s generosity will be expressed again in the mention of his love, and particularly through the term “grace,” which is synonymous with “mercy” and provides the keynote for the latter part of the passage in vv 5, 7, 8.

The other major motive cited for God’s initiative in saving his people is his attitude of love. *διὰ* plus the accusative of words for emotion indicates motivation. The writer also uses a cognate accusative expression to reinforce his thought—“the great love with which he loved us” (cf. 1:6; 1:19, 20; 4:1, which also employ cognate nouns and verbs). Just as the richness of God’s mercy has been stressed, so here is the greatness of his love. Again it is Romans among Paul’s letters which provides examples of his reflection on God’s love for his people demonstrated in Christ (cf. 5:5, 8; 8:39). As in Romans 5:8, so here in Ephesians the love of God will be shown to have its focus in the love of Christ, which led to his death on behalf of his people (cf. 5:2, 25). Against the background of vv 1–3, it is at once apparent that God’s love is not conditional on the suitability of the objects of that love.

5, 6 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, “made us alive with Christ even when we were dead through trespasses.” As we have already noted, it is only here that the main verb, which governs the thought of the passage to this point, is introduced. To remind his readers of the thought with which he had begun, the writer repeats his words from v 1, omitting “and sins” and changing the person from the second to the first person plural. In line with the progress of thought in vv 1–3, not only the readers but all believers are included in the assertion. The awkward καί at the beginning of this verse is probably best explained on the basis of this repetition of v 1, where its occurrence is in turn to be explained as being in dependence on Col 2:13 (cf. also Best, *JSNT*<sup>23</sup> 13 [1981] 15). As it now stands, it could be a simple connective between two elements, which side by side set what God has done in full perspective: out of his great love and when we were dead through trespasses, he made us alive with Christ (cf. Meyer, 109). Alternatively, the καί might well have the force of intensifying the participial clause which it introduces in the light of what has preceded it: “even when we were dead through trespasses” (cf. also Abbott, 47). God’s mercy and love caused him to act on behalf of men and women and to do what was necessary for them, even when they were in such a condition (cf. the similar thought in Rom 5:8, where God is said to show his love for us in Christ’s death “while we were yet sinners”).

Salvation for those whose plight is spiritual death must involve a raising to life. This is in fact what God has accomplished for believers. He made them alive with Christ. At this point also, Ephesians is reminiscent of Colossians. After the statement in Col 2:13 about the readers being dead through trespasses and the mention of the uncircumcision of their flesh (not taken up by Ephesians until 2:11), there follows the assertion that God made them alive together with Christ, phrased only slightly differently from Ephesians with the preposition σύν before a pronoun in addition to the συν-prefix to the verb—συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σύν αὐτῷ, “made you alive together with him.” *συνζωοποιεῖν* is used in the NT only in these two places. The

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<sup>23</sup>*JSNT Journal for the Study of the New Testament*

thought in both instances is that new life comes to believers because they share in what has happened to Christ. Although the simple verb ζωοποιεῖν, “to make alive,” is used in a number of places in connection with the resurrection of believers from the dead, it is used directly of God’s activity on behalf of Christ only in 1 Pet 3:18, “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.” The closest one comes to such usage in the Pauline corpus is 1 Cor 15:22, 23 where, after Paul’s statement that in Christ all shall be made alive, he explains the stages of this event of being made alive, starting with Christ as the firstfruits. Clearly, Christ’s being made alive meant also for the writer of Ephesians the resurrection and exaltation, as the next two verbs in v 6 confirm.

Believers’ participation in the event of Christ’s being made alive is expressed in v 5 through the σὺν- compound and the dative phrase τῷ Χριστῷ. The σὺν- prefix does not contain a reference to Jews and Gentiles sharing in a common resurrection (pace<sup>24</sup> Barth, 220; Ramaroson, *Bib<sup>25</sup>* 58 [1977] 402). This is not in view in vv 5, 6, where the parallels with 1:20 show that the relationship between the believer and Christ is the writer’s intended focus. The idea of participation “with Christ” is in continuity with the thought of Colossians, as we have seen, but also with that of other places in Paul. σὺν- compounds or expressions using the preposition σὺν are frequently found in eschatological contexts referring to living with Christ at the Parousia or after death and to sharing his glory (cf. 1 Thess 4:14, 17; 5:10; Rom 6:8; 8:17; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 1:23; Col 3:4). A relationship with Christ is in view which affects believers’ future destinies because it involves sharing in Christ’s destiny. Yet, characteristic of Paul’s thought is that a sharing in Christ’s glory and resurrection life is conditional on a sharing in the other aspect of his destiny, his death. “With Christ” language is found in connection with two aspects of sharing that death—sharing in it as an event of the past, a death to the old order and its powers, sometimes with explicitly baptismal overtones (cf. Rom 6:4, 5, 6, 8; Gal 2:19; Col 2:12, 20; 3:1), and sharing in its aspect of present suffering (cf. Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10). As we shall see in discussion of συνήγειρεν in v 6, there is some debate about how far “with Christ” language was extended by Paul to refer to a past or present sharing in Christ’s resurrection; but, apart from Col 2:12; 3:1, it can be argued that the notion of a present experience of this relationship is in view in 2 Cor 13:4, and the notion of a past experience is implicit in Rom 6. The “with Christ” relationship is closely linked in Paul’s thought with his other ways of expressing solidarity with Christ, such as “in Christ” or the notion, developed in Rom 5:12–21, of Christ as the inclusive representative of the new humanity. (On “with Christ” in Paul, cf. E. Lohmeyer, “ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ,” Festgabe für A. Deissmann [Tubingen: Mohr, 1927] 218–57; J. Dupont, ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ: *L’Union avec le Christ suivant saint Paul* [Bruges: Abbaye de Saint-André, 1952]; W. Grundmann, “σὺν-μετά,” *TDN<sup>26</sup>* 7 [1971] 766–97; E. Schweizer, “Dying and Rising with Christ,” *NTS<sup>27</sup>* 14 [1967–68] 1–14; R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* [Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1967]; P. Siber, *Mit Christus leben* [Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971].)

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<sup>24</sup>pace with due respect to, but differing from

<sup>25</sup>*Bib Biblica*

<sup>26</sup>*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

<sup>27</sup>*NTS* *New Testament Studies*

Passages such as Rom 4:17 and 8:11, where ζωοποιεῖν is used of future bodily resurrection, remind us that, with the use of the compound in the aorist tense here, the writer is talking about an experience of the resurrection life of the end-time ahead of time. This should not be thought of as totally foreign to Paul's use of ζωοποιεῖν, however. In 1 Cor 15:45 it can be said that Christ has already become creatively life-giving Spirit at his resurrection, and according to 2 Cor 3:6 this Spirit is already at work giving life. In distinction from the reference to having been made alive with Christ in Col 2:13, in Ephesians there are no preceding references to participation in Christ's death (cf. the circumcision of Christ, Col 2:11) or his burial (Col 2:12). But, in Colossians, having been made alive with Christ is closely associated with the following notions of forgiveness of sins and liberation from cosmic powers. Since sins and bondage to an evil supernatural power are present in the depiction of death in Eph 2:1–3, it could well be that forgiveness and liberation are implicit here also in the rescue act of making alive.

χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι, "by grace you have been saved." No sooner has the writer at last reached the main verb than he immediately breaks off the flow of thought with a parenthesis addressing the readers. It is an impassioned underlining of what the confessional statements he is making should mean for his readers. It draws their attention to the divine initiative, the definite accomplishment and the continuing reality involved in having been made alive together with Christ. Their new situation has been brought about by grace. In line with Paul's theologically rich use of the term χάρις, "grace," the writer asserts that salvation has been freely given by God to the readers as undeserving sinners.

In the OT, God's gracious approach to his people is often expressed through the verb יָנַח, *hānan*, which is used particularly in the Psalms in the context of Yahweh's rescuing his people from disease, distress, death, or Sheol, and forgiving their sins. How essentially such activity is characteristic of Yahweh and his sovereign freedom is indicated by a reference such as Exod 33:19, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." The cognate noun יָנַח, *hēn*, however, is seldom used of God's gracious action. Instead, it most frequently refers to the favor one person finds in the eyes of another. The noun which corresponds most closely to the semantic range of the verb יָנַח is in fact יָנַח, *hesed*, denoting overwhelming and unexpected kindness, which when used in the context of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel refers to God's abundant love, a major expression of which is his covenant with his people (e.g., Deut 5:10; 7:9, 12; Ps 89:28; Isa 54:8–10). In the LX<sup>28</sup>X χάρις, with one or two late exceptions, does not normally translate יָנַח but rather יָנַח. Instead יָנַח is translated by ἔλεος (cf. v 4 above) and יָנַח by ἐλεεῖν. Presumably the LX<sup>29</sup>X translators did not consider the use which χάρις had in classical Greek as appropriate enough for the contexts in which יָנַח and יָנַח appear. In classical Greek the term had three basic meanings: (i) a charming quality that wins favor, (ii) a quality of benevolence that gives favor to inferiors, and (iii) a response of gratitude for a favor given. The second of these meanings had potential for use in contexts of Yahweh's care for his people, but in classical Greek χάρις was not a major philosophical or religious term and had strong aesthetic connotations.

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<sup>28</sup>LXX Septuagint

<sup>29</sup>LXX Septuagint

Yet χάρις is the term especially characteristic of the Pauline corpus, where it occurs about one hundred times (most frequently in Romans—twenty-four times), and where more often than not it points to the special nature of God’s saving action as one of gratuitous generosity to an undeserving sinful humanity. It is found in contexts where it stands in antithesis to the law (e.g., Gal 2:21; 5:4; Rom 6:14) or sin (e.g., Rom 5:20, 21; 6:1), or where it is associated with Paul’s own call to become apostle to the Gentiles (e.g., Gal 1:15; 2:9; 1 Cor 3:10; 15:10). The reason Paul could use this term is that χάρις became popular in the religious sense among Greek-speaking Jews around the time of the completion of the LX<sup>30</sup>X. In Wisdom and Apocalyptic literature χάρις was increasingly used for the eschatological reward of the elect (e.g., Wis 3:9; 4:14, 15; 1 *Enoc*<sup>31</sup>h 99.13), as a major term for the blessings of the salvation of the end-time (cf. 1 *Enoc*<sup>32</sup>h 5.4–8), and in association with the revealed wisdom to be found in the Torah. Later Greek translations of the OT (e.g., Symmachus) often render ΤΟΝ by χάρις. It appears, then, that Pauline terminology represents a stage in the trajectory of the usage of χάρις where its religious connotations have increased and it can be seen as synonymous with ἔλεος or even be preferred to it. (On the background of χάρις and its use in Paul cf. H. Conzelmann and W. Zimmerli, “χάρις,” *TDN*<sup>33</sup>T 9 [1974] 372–402; G. P. Wetter, *Charis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913]; J. Wobbe, *Der Charisgedanke bei Paulus* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1932]; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 1 [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951] 281–91; D. J. Doughty, “The Priority of Charis: An Investigation of the Theological Language of Paul,” *NT*<sup>34</sup>S 18 [1972] 163–80; K. Berger, “‘Gnade’ im frühen Christentum,” *NedTT*<sup>35</sup>s 27 [1973] 1–25; and on the general concept of grace in Judaism and Paul rather than the actual term χάρις cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] passim<sup>36</sup>m)

Here in Eph 2:5 the emphasis on grace takes up that already found in the *berakah* in 1:6, 7, and it will occur again and be amplified in 2:7–9. It is given added force by contrasts suggested by the context. As in Paul (e.g., Rom 5:12–21), the abundance and effectiveness of grace is highlighted against a backdrop of sin and death (vv 1, 5). The reality and generosity of grace is appreciated all the more after a statement which shows how seriously God takes human sinfulness, deeming it to be deserving of his wrath (v 3). And from the human standpoint, the necessity of an intervention of grace is underlined when set in contrast to the bankruptcy and doom of a humanity left to itself, left to what it is “by nature” (v 3). “By grace you have been saved” draws the readers’ attention to God’s sovereign freedom from obligation in saving them.

σεσωσμένοι, “having been saved,” is a perfect passive participle. Apart from the repetition of this term in v 8, the only other places where σώζειν is used in the perfect tense in the NT are in the Synoptics, where individuals are told by Jesus, “your faith has saved you” (cf. Mark 5:34

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<sup>30</sup>LXX Septuagint

<sup>31</sup>1 *Enoch* Ethiopic, Slavonic, Hebrew Enoch

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<sup>33</sup>*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

<sup>34</sup>*NTS New Testament Studies*

<sup>35</sup>*NedTTs* Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift

<sup>36</sup>passim elsewhere



par.; 10:52 par.; Luke 17:19). The one instance where such a statement refers not to a healing but to the forgiveness of sins is Luke 7:50. In Paul the verb σώζειν is normally found in the future tense and the noun σωτηρία in a future context (e.g., Rom 5:9, 10; 10:9, 13; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5), but there are also several references to salvation as a present experience (cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15; 6:2; Phil 2:12). In two places salvation is described with an aorist tense. In 1 Cor 1:21 an aorist infinitive is used in a past context, but this is in regard to God's decision and cannot stand as evidence for a completed salvation (cf. 1:18). In Rom 8:24 the aorist passive is employed, but with the significant qualifying phrase "in hope." The difference between Eph 2:5 and the undisputed Pauline letters should, then, be carefully noted, but not exaggerated (*contra*<sup>37</sup>, e.g., Houlden, 283, who claims that it provides one of the best indications that the writer is not Paul; Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 137: "totally un-Pauline"). For Paul salvation does have past, present, and future aspects. It would not be totally out of place for him to use the perfect of σώζειν with its normal force of emphasizing the continuing present effect of a past action, as he does with the perfect of other aspects of salvation in Rom 5:2; 6:7. Paul does not use "by grace" or "by faith" with "to save" or "salvation" but with "to justify" or "justification." It appears then that Ephesians takes up Pauline thought, but uses the more general terminology. Similar combinations of the notions of grace and salvation can be found in Acts 15:11 and 2 Tim 1:9. Yet it must also be said that in Paul salvation can be a virtual synonym for justification (in Rom 10:10), and "to justify" is used in the future (Rom 2:13; cf. also Gal 5:5), present (Rom 3:24), and aorist (Rom 4:2; 5:1, 9) tenses, but is also found in the perfect (Rom 6:7). Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that Rom 5:9 is most characteristic of Paul's use of justification and salvation terminology, where the aorist of the former and the future of the latter are used. By using the more inclusive term and indicating its completion, Ephesians constitutes a break with characteristic Pauline usage.

The perfect tense of "to save" in 2:5 should come as no surprise after the eulogy of 1:3–14, which blesses God for all the blessings of salvation with which he has already graciously blessed believers (cf. also the use of σωτηρία in 1:13). "To save" here is an inclusive term characterizing God's acts of making alive, raising up, and seating with Christ as a deliverance from the plight of the old situation to all the benefits of the new. The perfect tense draws attention to the continuing effects of that rescue act for the present, is in line with the surrounding aorists and the realized eschatology of vv 5, 6, and will be balanced by the future perspective of v 7.

καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, "and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." The συν compounds recall the simple forms ἐγείρας, "raised," and καθίσας, "seated," of 1:20. In contrast to the συν compound in v 5 there is no accompanying dative; the τῷ Χριστῷ of v 5 is to be understood. The notion of a relationship with Christ is reinforced this time by the accompanying phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. For a discussion of the use of ἐν Χριστῷ in Paul and Ephesians, see *Comment* on 1:3. It is possible that the phrase here means simply "through the agency of Christ Jesus" (cf. J. A. Allan, "The 'In Christ' Formula in Ephesians," *NTS* 5 [1958–59] 58; Gnllka, 120), but it is more likely that this is an instance where it has the stronger sense of "having been incorporated into Christ." The phrase, therefore, provides further explanation of how it can be said that what

<sup>37</sup>*contra* in contrast to

<sup>38</sup>*NTS New Testament Studies*

God did for Christ he did at the same time for believers (cf: also J. A. Robinson, 156; Abbott, 50; Schnackenburg, *Baptism*, 76–77; Schlier, 111; Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 122). Believers are seen as included in Christ, so what God accomplished for Christ he accomplished for him as the representative, the head of a new humanity. Since “with Christ,” which is the force of the *συν* prefix, and “in Christ Jesus” both suggest a relationship of solidarity, the combination of the two in v 6 is again characteristic of Ephesians’ redundancy of style for the sake of emphasis. Certainly the intimate union between Christ and believers is given heavy stress in v 6. 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.

The notion of resurrection with Christ is not, of course, unique to Ephesians and is found in Col 2:12 and 3:1. There, however, it is expressed in a passive form; believers have been raised with Christ. Here the form is active; God has raised believers with Christ. This suggests that the predominant influence on the writer’s formulation has been the earlier statement of 1:20 about God raising Christ; he desires to provide a parallel in the case of believers. However, the thought of Col 2:12 and 3:1 provided the background and opened up the possibility of thinking of this parallel to Christ’s resurrection.

How far is such a parallel in line with the thought of the undisputed Pauline letters? Some claim that in Rom 6:1–11 Paul views resurrection with Christ as an event that remains wholly future, so that the assertion of Colossians and Ephesians that believers have already been raised with Christ contradicts Paul’s eschatological reserve (e.g., E. Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1933] 143; Lohse, *Colossians*, 104, 134 n<sup>39</sup>. 13, 180; Gnika, 119, 122–23; Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 125). The claim in this form cannot stand. It is true that in Rom 6:5, 8 the future tense is used, whereas in Col 2:12; 3:1; and Eph 2:6 the aorist is to be found. But in Rom 6 there are two poles to Paul’s thinking about resurrection life—it has been entered on by the believer in union with Christ, yet its consummation still lies in the future. Paul’s main emphasis in that context is on having died with Christ to the dominion of sin. But this is a precondition which finds its intended completion in the sharing of the new resurrection life of Christ, “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (6:4). This present aspect of sharing in Christ’s resurrection is seen also in 6:10, 11. Through his resurrection Christ now lives to God, and since they are *ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* and identified with Christ in both his death and his resurrection life, believers are also to consider themselves alive to God. Unless the apostle thought of believers as already having been identified with Christ in his resurrection, this would simply be make-believe. The “already” pole of Paul’s thought about being raised with Christ is clearly there in Rom 6 (cf. also G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* [London: Macmillan, 1962] 126–46; C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975] 1:299–316, who in the light of such considerations takes the future tenses of 6:5, 8 as referring to the present moral life of believers). Paul’s reference to living with Christ in 2 Cor 13:4, though expressed in the future tense, has clear reference to this life and his relationship with the Corinthians, *εἰς ὑμᾶς*, “toward you.”

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<sup>39</sup>n. note

When such thought becomes explicit in Col 2:12; 3:1, it is difficult to see why it should be considered un-Pauline. The variation in tense and terminology between Romans and Colossians remains significant not so much for authorship as for an indication of the different emphases of these two letters in response to different situations (cf. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 122–23, 131–34, for a fuller discussion). The thought in Eph 2:6 of God’s having raised believers with Christ cannot then in itself be held to be out of line with Paul. Aside from the change from passive to active form in the formulation, two contextual differences between its occurrence here and in Colossians should, however, be noted. Whereas in Colossians having been raised with Christ remains in close association with having died or been buried with Christ (cf. 2:11, 12; 2:20; 3:3), these aspects of union with Christ are absent from Ephesians. In Colossians, also, the eschatological reserve is retained in explicit reference to sharing Christ’s resurrection life, as a present hiddenness and a future consummation of this relationship are asserted in 3:3, 4, while in Eph. 2 there is no mention of the future aspect of the resurrection life for believers (though there is a more general future reference in 2:7). These differences suggest a development in Ephesians from Colossians in its even sharper realized eschatological focus on the present status of believers.

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the statement that God has seated believers with Christ in the heavenly realms. This is a making explicit of what in Col 3:1–3 had only been implicit. There the believer is exhorted to seek τὰ ἄνω, “the things above,” because Christ is above and the believer’s life is hidden with Christ in God. In Col 3:1 the realm above is closely related to the sphere of resurrection existence, for those whose whole concern is to be the things above, where Christ is, are those who already share his resurrection life. Since resurrection life is heavenly life, by being united with Christ in his resurrection believers participate in the life of the realm above, and the imperatives in 3:1, 2 can be seen to be based on indicatives. The writer of Ephesians has grasped this thought clearly and here spells out its significance boldly. If believers have been given a share in Christ’s resurrection life, they can also be said to share in the triumph of its heavenly aspect. Again the desire to complete the parallel with 1:20 dictates the formulation, “and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms,” and the Colossians background opens the way for the thought behind it. For the force of the phrase “in the heavenly realms,” see *Comment* on 1:3. It should be observed that along with the parallel between believers and Christ there remains also a distinction. The phrase ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, “at his right hand,” in 1:20 is reserved for Christ and not repeated in the case of believers in 2:6. Although believers share in Christ’s exaltation, his position in the heavenly realm and his relationship to God are unique.

The most direct influence on the writer at this point appears to be Colossians, but are there any other sources for or parallels to his striking language in 2:6? We do find such language echoed and ascribed to Paul in the Christian Gnostic text of the *Treatise on Resurrection* 45, “Then, indeed, as the Apostle said, ‘We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him’ ” (cf. *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. J. M. Robinson [New York: Harper and Row, 1977] 51). This later Gnostic use of a combination of Rom 8:17 and Eph 2:6 cannot, however, shed much light on the background of Ephesians. Nor is the gnosticizing thought of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, whereby a heavenly journey liberates the initiate’s soul from the material world so that he perceives he is in heaven (cf. 10.25; 13.11), likely to have influenced this notion of God’s having seated believers with (Christ in the heavenly realms. Greater light is

shed on this notion by the motif, which was fairly widespread in apocalyptic writings, of the righteous entering into eschatological life and dominion and sitting on heavenly thrones (cf. Dan 7:22, 27; Wis 3:8; 5:15, 16; *1 Enoch*<sup>40</sup> 108.12; Apoc<sup>41</sup>. *Elijah* 37.3, 4; T. *Job* 33.3–5; *Asc. Isa.* 9:18). In the NT itself this tradition is reflected in passages such as Matt 19:28, 1 Cor 6:2, or especially Rev 3:21, “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (cf. also 20:4). This tradition of a future role for the righteous and particularly the Rev 3:21 reference, where this is expressed in terms of being seated with Christ, only serve to highlight by contrast the fact that Eph 2:6 claims that this has already been accomplished for believers. Closer to the realized eschatology of Ephesians, while remaining within the developing tradition of Jewish apocalyptic, is the self-understanding of the Qumran community that as an elect group on earth, it already experienced the heavenly realm and formed a liturgical community with the inhabitants of heaven. 1Q<sup>42</sup>H 3.19–22 reads, “I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast redeemed my soul from the Pit, and from the Hell of Abaddon Thou hast raised me up to everlasting height.... Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones, and that it may enter into community with the congregation of the Sons of Heaven” (cf. also 1Q<sup>43</sup>H 11.10–12; H.-W. Kuhn, *Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966] 44–188; Mussner, “Contributions,” 164–167; Gnika, 123–24).

Such ideas current in Judaism had already been adapted by Pauline thought and brought into contact with the cosmological concerns of Hellenistic syncretism in dealing with the situation in Colossae. In Colossians, where the claim of the false teaching threatening the church was that certain regulations had to be observed and certain techniques had to be practiced to achieve access to the heavenly realm, the author had replied with a stress on the realized aspect of his eschatology with its spatial element, showing that believers already participate in heavenly life in Christ (cf. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 110–34). The writer to the Ephesians can continue this emphasis. What is, of course, distinctive about the present experience of the heavenly realm highlighted in Eph 2:6, as opposed to that of Qumran, is that here it is totally dependent on Christ’s prior exaltation. The believer’s experience is a participation in Christ’s life and reign in the heavenly realms. Though more pronounced in Ephesians, this focus on a present experience of heaven, on the spatial aspect of realized eschatology, is not a new departure. Not only is it in continuity with Colossians but also with several passages in the earlier Pauline letters (cf. Gal 4:26; 1 Cor 15:47–49; 2 Cor 12:2–4; Phil 3:20; cf. also Lincoln, *Paradise*, passim<sup>44</sup>). If, as seems likely, Ephesians was addressed to churches of Asia Minor, where syncretism with cosmological concerns similar to those which took specific form in the Colossian philosophy was still prevalent, then this spatial emphasis continued to be appropriate as a means of underlining that God had through Christ done all that was necessary for believers’ salvation. The writer is under no illusion, however, that there is no more of significance to

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<sup>40</sup>1 *Enoch* Ethiopic, Slavonic, Hebrew *Enoch*

<sup>41</sup>Apoc. Apocrypha

<sup>42</sup>1QH *Hôdāyôt* (*Thanksgiving Hymns*) from Qumran Cave 1

<sup>43</sup>1QH *Hôdāyôt* (*Thanksgiving Hymns*) from Qumran Cave 1

<sup>44</sup>passim elsewhere

happen as regards salvation, and the realized emphasis of 2:6 has to be balanced against the future element in 2:7 (cf. also 1:14; 4:30; 5:5, 27; 6:8, 13).

It still needs to be asked what is meant when it is said of believers who are still in their mortal bodies and still on earth that God has raised them up with Christ and seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms. When Paul used the language of dying and rising with Christ in Rom 6 and Col 2 and 3, he had in view not primarily some subjective religious experience on the part of believers but rather thought of believers as having been Christ's partners in the events of past redemptive history. For him, Christ's death was a death to the old order, to the powers of this age, including sin, and his resurrection was a coming alive to a new order, in which he functioned as Lord with the power of God. Christ's death and resurrection changed the power structures in history. For believers to have died and been raised with Christ was the equivalent of having been transferred from the old dominion to the new, because in God's sight they had been included in what had happened to Christ. The fact of temporal distance created no major problem for Paul because he did not think of individuals as isolated from the power sphere in which they existed, but rather viewed present existence as continuing to be determined by the events on which it was founded. He saw the new dominion as a whole as participating in those events of Christ's death and resurrection through its representative head. Similarly, when the writer to the Ephesians says God has raised believers up with Christ, he too means they have been assigned to the new reality introduced by Christ's resurrection. He extends the range of events in the history of salvation in which believers are to see themselves included, by the reference to having been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. As 1:20–22 make clear, Christ's exaltation involved his triumph and rule over hostile cosmic powers. A new situation in regard to these powers was inaugurated in history by Christ's victory. That God has seated believers with Christ means therefore that they are part of the new dominion's superiority over the old, participating in its liberation from the powers and its restoration of harmony to the cosmos. The imagery of being seated with Christ is not associated with sharing a meal, and thereby a reference to enjoying fellowship with God (*contra*<sup>45</sup> a Mitton, 90). Both the parallel with 1:20 and the depiction of the past in 2:2 as being under the control of the ruler of the realm of the air make clear that this picture of the present involves sharing Christ's victory over such powers. In continuity with categories drawn from apocalyptic writings, the past is seen as under the dominance of this age, this world, and its ruler, while present salvation involves enjoying the life and the rule of the age to come made available already in heaven where Christ now is.

Being raised up and seated with Christ has as its basic meaning being viewed by God as included in the events of Christ's resurrection and exaltation determinative for the new dominion, but believers are initiated into the new movement within history and appropriate its reality in their own time through faith and baptism. Since faith represents the believer's commitment and baptism is its expression, there is no reason to deny the suggestion of many commentators that the readers are likely to have associated the language of being raised and seated with Christ with the significance of baptism in their own experience (see the further discussion of a baptismal setting under *Form/Structure/Setting* above). The new dominion into which believers have been initiated is firmly anchored within history. The writer is under no illusion that sharing in Christ's victory brings removal from the sphere of conflict. The rest of the

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<sup>45</sup>*contra* in contrast to

letter provides ample evidence that those who have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies are at the same time those who must walk in the world (cf. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15) and stand in the midst of the continuing battle with the powers (cf. 6:11–16).

7 ἵνα ἐνδείξῃται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “so that he might show in the ages to come the surpassing richness of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Through the ἵνα, this clause concludes the flow of thought begun in v 4 by indicating the purpose of the divine activity that has been depicted. What God has done in making believers alive with Christ, raising them up with him and seating them with him in the heavenly realms, he has done not only for their sake but also as part of the larger purpose of displaying the richness of his grace. Such a thought is familiar from the *berakah* of 1:3–14, where the ultimate goal of salvation was seen as the glory of God (cf. 1:6, 12, 14). In particular, 1:6 expressed the goal of believers’ predestination to be sons and daughters of God as “the praise of the glory of his grace.” The verb used in the formulation of the goal of salvation here in 2:7 is ἐνδείκνυμι. It goes far beyond the evidence to claim, as does Barth (222, 238–42), that this is a technical juridical term being employed here to indicate that God puts forward believers as “proof” in a cosmic lawsuit. It should be taken in its general sense of “to show, demonstrate.” While in Rom 9:22 Paul can speak of God as showing his wrath, here the writer has God showing his grace. As the writer’s thought and style attempt to capture something of the extravagance of God’s display of grace, it becomes not just grace but “the richness of his grace” (cf. also 1:7), and not just the richness of his grace but “the surpassing richness of his grace.”<sup>46</sup>

2:1–3 explain non-Christian human existence in two ways: as governed internally by sin and externally by evil supernatural powers. Can these two approaches be reconciled? While economic pressures on people may come from outside as a result of the human greed of others, a person’s genetic constitution cannot be blamed on the sin of others. A<sup>47</sup>E had probably not

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, [Ephesians](#), vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 97–109.

<sup>47</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

thought much about economic pressures as such; their results on individuals he would probably have put down to evil supernatural forces; as for sins, he would also probably have put these down both to human nature and, with much traditional theology, to outside powers like the devil.<sup>48</sup>

4. If unbelievers were once dead in sin, under the power of evil supernatural beings, controlled by their own wicked desires and subject to God's wrath, they could expect no mercy from God, yet (δέ) surprisingly, that is not so for God is rich in mercy. Thus the anacoluthon of vv. 2, 3 not only elaborates v. 1 but also sets off more strongly the contrast appearing with v. 4. The new position of believers is a result only of the nature and activity of God. As in chap. 1 so here again the initiative in salvation lies with God and we have a *theology* rather than a *christology*. It is probably wrong to overstress here the contrast between the 'wrath of God' (v. 3) and his 'mercy'. When A<sup>49</sup>E began v. 1 he had v. 4 in mind; v. 3c is not then a climax carefully built up through vv. 1–3b to be contrasted with v. 4. The real contrast lies between 'death' (vv. 1, 5) and 'life' (συνεζωοποίησεν, v. 5). It is introduced with a general statement of God's nature: πλούσιος (a favourite term of A<sup>50</sup>E, see on 1:7, though he normally prefers the neuter) ὧν ἐν (for the construction instead of the more usual genitive see Jas 2:5; 1 Tim 6:18; 1 Kgdms 2:10) ἐλέει; since the latter is not a passive concept it leads on naturally to a succession of active verbs.

Some commentators (e.g. Schlier, Conzelmann, Gnllka; see Gnllka, 117, n. 5, for further references) have seen a connection between the use of ἔλεος and baptism and instance 1 Pet 1:3 and Tit 3:5 as parallels. This connection may also appear in vv. 5f where the themes of being dead and being raised with Christ may be related to baptism through Rom 6:1ff and Col 2:12; in Col 2:12 baptism is clearly in mind. The connection of ἔλεος with baptism is certainly present in Tit 3:5, but it is not immediately so in 1 Pet 1:3 unless that letter is taken to be a baptismal sermon or liturgy; this is unlikely.<sup>3512</sup> ἔλεος is also used in 'election' contexts (Rom 9:23; 11:30–2; 1 Pet 1:3) and since this is a theme prominent in 1:3–14 it may have determined its choice here. It is more probable, however, that A<sup>52</sup>E chose the word because it is one occurring frequently in the OT, and is a synonym for ἀγάπη which he is just about to use. (For the possible relation of vv. 5f to baptism see discussion there.) Noting the paronomasia in v. 4b (cf 1:3) we need to ask whether the clause is to be connected backwards to v. 4a or forwards to v. 5. If it is connected backwards, then to write of God's love is another way of saying that he is merciful, and the aorist tense<sup>3533</sup> of ἡγάπησεν would not be restricted to the event of the cross. If it is connected forwards, the aorist would have a once-for-all significance relating to the essence of God's action in the death of his son. Perhaps it is wrong to select one of these alternatives.

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<sup>48</sup> Ernest Best, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians\*](#), International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998), 212.

<sup>49</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>50</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>512</sup> See Best, *1 peter* (NCB), London, 1971, 20–7; L. Goppelt, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (KEK), Göttingen, 1978, 37–40; C. F. D. Moule, 'The Nature and Purpose of 1 Peter', *NTS* 3 (1956) 1–11.

<sup>52</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>533</sup> An aorist of an extended act, Burton § 39, or a timeless aorist, Porter, 237.

Rather v. 4b is a connecting link between v. 4a and v. 5. God's love in the death of his son is a part of his merciful attitude towards people which reaches its climax in that death, so that through that death those who are dead in sin are made to live. The new life of Christians is then related directly to God's action in Christ rather than to his nature as merciful.

αὐτοῦ is omitted by  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  D\* F G b; Ambr Aug; the meaning is not affected. The variant ἡλέησεν  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  b d; Ambst which also omits ἧν is probably due to the desire to give a main verb to v. 4 and so remove the difficulty caused by the καί at the beginning of v. 5; its substitution weakens the sentence and though creating another paronomasia it would not be as easily grasped as that in the text which plays on the root ἀγαπα. ἀγάπην is a cognate accusative (Moul<sup>54</sup>e, 32; MH<sup>55</sup>T, 245). For contrasting views and arguments on this second variant see Ramaroson, art.cit., and Romaniuk, 212f.

5. Here as at v. 1 the initial καί is difficult and probably due to the use of preformed material (see on v. 1). This assumption is better than taking it to mean 'also' or giving it concessive value. As we have seen, scribes modified v. 4 so that καί could have its normal meaning 'and'. It is probably best left untranslated and the words following it taken as the object of συνεζωοποίησεν (for detailed studies of attempts to find a meaning for καί when no allowance is made for the use of preformed material, see Ewald and Haupt). Our verse repeats the essential content of v. 1 with the omission of 'sins',<sup>3564</sup> which was an addition in v. 1 to the preformed material; it also alters the second person to the first. The verb provides the new element in what A<sup>57</sup>E is saying.

συζωοποιεῖν is not found in non-Christian Greek and only here, in Col 2:13 and in later Christian writing dependent on these two verses. The simpler ζωοποιεῖν is however used regularly by Paul (cf Jn 5:21; 6:63; 1 Pet 3:18) and almost always in a resurrection context (Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45). He uses it twice in the future tense of the resurrection of believers (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22) and twice as a present participle describing the activity of God or Christ (Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 15:45). All his references may be understood as relating to the future final resurrection, whereas here and in Col 2:13 the act of making alive lies in the past. This distinction is not sufficient to compel a reference here to Christ as the Second Adam.<sup>3585</sup> It is also not clear that the word necessarily carries a resurrection connotation, for this does not appear to be the case in Jos As 8:10f where it seems to apply rather to conversion.<sup>3596</sup> This would appear to be its primary significance here where the verb's reference to 'life' contrasts vividly with the concept that those outside the Christian community were previously dead. When it is said that the Spirit gives life (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:6; Jn 6:63) there is no explicit connection with

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<sup>54</sup>Moule C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge, 1953

<sup>55</sup>MHT J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, Edinburgh, 1963

<sup>5634</sup> There are quite a number of variants here.  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  reads σώμασιν, D\*, partially supported by F G, substitutes ἀμαρτίαις.  $\Psi$  Or<sup>lat</sup> read the phrase of v. 1, as does B, but with ἐπιθυμίαις for ἀμαρτίαις. The variety of alteration suggests the difficulty of the phrase, a difficulty probably caused by the initial καί.

<sup>57</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>5835</sup> So Macpherson, 162f; Coutts.

<sup>5936</sup> Cf A. J. M. Wedderburn, op.cit., 218f.



resurrection. In v. 5 we have in fact the first of three steps, the verbs of v. 6 denoting the second and third: made alive, raised, seated in the heavenlies. Dead people cannot bring themselves back to life (Könn) and so the first step here, and the following two, come from God. We can arrange neither to be born nor to be reborn.

The antithesis between death and life in v. 5 is not however the same as that in Romans 6 where a past dying with Christ is usually understood as contrasting with a future rising with him, and of course it is not the same as in those passages where 'with Christ' refers to a final future existence. What we have here must have arisen independently,<sup>3607</sup> for the death is one existing from the time of birth, is one in sin (see v. 1) not one with Christ. There is much in the N<sup>61</sup>T, e.g. the new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) or the concept of the new birth, testifying to the present new life of believers (see Best, 'Dead', for parallels). Those born anew commence, as it were, a new life just as dead unbelievers begin to live when they are made alive by God. The new life must have begun at some point, as is indicated here (cf Col 2:13) by the use of the aorist. Paul, of course, uses the aorist in respect of justification (Rom 5:1, 9; 8:30; 1 Cor 6:11).

When do believers begin to enjoy this new life? (a) at the resurrection of Christ? (b) at the moment when faith began? (c) at their baptism? (d), and very much a counsel of despair, after death, the verb being taken as an unfulfilled aorist (so Meyer, Salmond)? (a) is a possibility (cf Caird, Lock) in the sense that when Christ who was a representative or inclusive figure was raised all were potentially raised with him; the aorist ἡγάπησεν in v. 4, which can be referred to the Christ-event, gives some support to this view. Yet believers were dead in an entirely different way from Christ and therefore can hardly have been 'included' in him when he was made alive. The choice must then lie between (b) and (c). The readers, once dead, have been made alive and this would have taken place at the moment they became Christians. But is this the moment when faith began or the moment when they were baptised? The reference to 'faith' (v. 8) would support (b); the reference to baptism is clear in the similar passage of Col 2:13.<sup>3628</sup> But the distinction later theologians have drawn between the moments of faith and baptism, derived from the post-New Testament practice of enforcing a lengthy catechumenate, would have been unreal to the primitive church. Acts shows that once belief had been affirmed baptism followed directly as the first act of obedient faith (cf 2:41; 8:36; 10:47f; 16:31–3); Acts probably represents in this respect both what originally happened and the practice of its own period which was more or less contemporary with that of Ephesians. It is probably then incorrect to ask whether A<sup>63</sup>E had faith or baptism in mind; for him they would have been an indissoluble unity.

We have assumed here that the σύν of the verb related believers to Christ. However, if ἐν is read before τῷ Χριστῷ this will not be so. This reading has good support: Ɔ<sup>46</sup>46 B 33 a (g) vg<sup>cl</sup>; MVict Ambst Chr. If ἐν was not originally present it may have appeared either through duplication of the final syllable of the verb or under the influence of the familiar formula 'in Christ' which is found in vv. 6, 7; however, had the formula been already present it would surely not have been altered. Commentators who accept

<sup>6037</sup> Cf P. Siber, *Mit Christus leben: eine Studie zur paulinischen Auferstehungshoffnung*, Zürich, 1971, 202ff.

<sup>61</sup>NT *Novum Testamentum*

<sup>6238</sup> E. Larsson, *Christus als Vorbild* (ASNU 23), Uppsala, 1962, 105–8.

<sup>63</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

it understand the σὺν to refer to the drawing together of Jewish and Gentile Christians. If v. 5 had lain in 2:14–22, or even in a passage about the unity of the church, this might have been a possible understanding but, since it does not, it is not. As for the togetherness of Jewish and Gentile Christians, this is related neither to the ultimate purpose (v. 7) of being made alive nor to the main drive of the passage on the saving mercy of God; to accept it would destroy the strong link between v. 6, where the σὺν would have to continue to carry this meaning, and 1:20, where the simple forms of the same basic verbs are used of Christ. Generally in the Pauline corpus where verbs are compounded with σὺν the reference is to a linking with Christ. Where the verb is used in Col 2:13 there is no idea of a relationship of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The view of Lindemann (ad loc and *Aufhebung*, 118ff) that it simply means ‘we together’ is more than a little weak. We therefore reject the reading ἐν. In Col 2:13 the reference to Christ is made clear with an additional σὺν αὐτῷ; Paul does not usually spell out the reference in this way; A<sup>64</sup>E is therefore more Pauline than A/Co<sup>65</sup>I and so he will hardly have been copying from him. For the article with Christ see on 1:10.

σὺ, with or without τῇ, is read before χάριτι by D\* F G a b vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>p</sup>; MVict Ambst Aug and is almost certainly an attempt to iron out the sudden break before v. 5a. χάριτι is anarthrous indicating that emphasis rests on the contrast with other possible means of salvation rather than on the nature of the actual action as gracious (cf MH<sup>66</sup>T, 176; Zerwic<sup>67</sup>k, §76).

A brief parenthesis now breaks the sequence of thought: χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι. (For a discussion whether this and vv. 8f may be a gloss or glosses see on vv. 8f.) If A<sup>68</sup>E’s readers have been made alive this is not through any effort or goodness on their part but only because of the grace of God. A<sup>69</sup>E develops this thought in vv. 8–10 but he cannot wait until then to express his wonder at what God has done. The parenthesis as such stands out from the ongoing argument through the sudden change from the first person to the second; there are changes in person again at v. 8 and v. 10. It is unlikely that A<sup>70</sup>E wishes to distinguish in v. 5b between himself and his readers or between Jewish and Gentile Christians as if either he or Jewish Christians were not saved in the same way as others. Barth, 221, suggests the second person represents the antiphonal response of the leader of worship to the hymn of the people which he assumes is found in vv. 4–7 (elsewhere, 217f, Barth appears to doubt whether a hymn underlies our passage). But why should the leader isolate himself in this way from his congregation, implying that they need grace whereas he does not? Moreover if the readers of the letter are to be able to recognise an antiphonal response they must be assumed to know the liturgy in question and, while this might be possible in a letter addressed to one congregation which the author knew well, it is hardly likely in the case of a general letter where the writer may not know all the communities he is addressing. It is then better to take the parenthesis as an interjection of the author in which by a change of person he drives home his point more forcefully (so Henle,

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<sup>64</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>65</sup>A/Col Author of Colossians

<sup>66</sup>MHT J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, Edinburgh, 1963

<sup>67</sup>Zerwick M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (ET by J. Smith), Rome, 1963

<sup>68</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>69</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>70</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

Macpherson), recognising at the same time that it could indeed be a quotation of a phrase regularly used in worship (cf Lindemann, *Aufhebung*, 173).

The perfect tense *σεσωσμένοι* is unusual in the Pauline corpus. Paul normally uses the verb in the future (e.g. Rom 5:8, 9; 9:27; 1 Cor 3:13) or with a future reference (e.g. Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 5:5), though he also speaks of salvation as an ongoing process (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15) and uses the cognate noun to describe that process (Rom 10:10; 2 Cor 6:2). Only once (Rom 8:24) does he set salvation in the past and there it is qualified by a reference to hope. Moreover he does not elsewhere connect *χάρις* with *σώζειν* relating it instead to *δικαιοῦν*. In view of these differences from Paul's normal usage, it is surprising to find Foulkes describing the present clause as Paul's 'favourite summing up of the gospel'. Bruce is surely more correct when he says the clause 'departs from *distinctively* Pauline usage' (italics as in Bruce). We must leave a discussion of the significance of the changes until vv. 8–10. For the moment we note that the perfect tense, and a periphrastic perfect at that (cf Moul<sup>71</sup>e, 18f; Burto<sup>72</sup>n § 84), suggests that the 'state of salvation' is in mind; 'life' will now be continuous since death is past.

6. In Col 2:13 being made alive with Christ is explained as the forgiveness of sin and the cancellation of the legal bond; Eph 2:6 explains it through a change of imagery which relates it to the resurrection and ascension. This appears to create a temporal sequence with ascension with Christ following on resurrection with him, but this is an illusion so far as A<sup>73</sup>E is concerned; believers once raised are in heaven and are there immediately seated. So the two verbs of v. 6 do not follow chronologically on the being made alive of v. 5. It is better to regard all three verbs as aspects of the same act of God, made alive, raised, seated. 'Made alive' comes first because nothing can happen without the dead being made alive. Being made alive with Christ is not Paul's normal expression for entrance into the Christian life, though as a word which he related to resurrection (Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36) it could suggest the present change of imagery. Paul usually describes the passage from pagan to Christian life by means of *σύν* compounded with verbs of dying and rising. A<sup>74</sup>E follows the same way of thinking, perhaps suggested to him by his own use of *σύν* in v. 5; v. 6 thus offers an alternative explanation of what it means to be a Christian. A<sup>75</sup>E chooses the same verbs as those of 1:20, verbs drawn from the Christian credo, but now compounded with *σύν*. It is interesting that at this point his sequence of events differs from that of Col 2:12f where burial and resurrection with Christ precede being made alive from the death of sin and the latter is apparently the explanation of the former. A<sup>76</sup>E can have a different order because his primary focus is not on baptism, a conclusion all the stronger if he did not use Colossians here; lacking the interest in baptism he is able to drop the idea of dying or being buried with Christ. For A<sup>77</sup>E rising with Christ and sitting with him in heaven explain the significance of being made alive.

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<sup>71</sup>Moule C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge, 1953

<sup>72</sup>Burton *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*<sup>3</sup>, Edinburgh, 1955

<sup>73</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

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<sup>77</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

It is unnecessary to explore the origin of the formula uniting σὺν with various verbs of dying and rising;<sup>789</sup> by the time of Ephesians it was part and parcel of Pauline imagery; in Paul the verbs relating to resurrection are normally in the future. However, in our verse resurrection with Christ is set in the past and with it is linked the heavenly session with Christ, both seen as accomplished facts. The change to the past tense in respect of resurrection with Christ had already been made in Col 2:12; 3:1. It is not unnatural. The present nature of new life with Christ following on a past death with him is certainly indicated in the genuine Pauline letters (Rom 6:4, 10, 11, 13; 7:4; Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 4:10, 12; 5:17); there is no point in exhorting believers to live a new life if that life belongs only to the future. In Rom 6:1ff dying and rising with Christ is associated with baptism; baptism was a past fact for believers; it was inevitable that some who had been baptised should eventually come to think of their resurrection as past fact since they were already enjoying the new life that resurrection would bring; indeed we find that when the pastness of resurrection with Christ is first positively stated in Col 2:12 it is linked to baptism; A/Co<sup>79</sup> I may however have had some hesitation about this, since in 3:5 he writes of the new risen life as hidden with God. In Eph 2:6 there is no explicit reference to baptism and it is difficult to argue for an implicit one, since A<sup>80</sup>E does not use the verbs denoting dying and being buried with Christ which are particularly linked with it in Rom 6; the absence of a reference to baptism is not unreasonable, since from the beginning expressions relating to new life with Christ were not exclusively associated with the rite (cf Gal 2:19f; 6:14; 2 Cor 4:10; 5:14; Phil 3:10<sup>810</sup>); Christians of that period did not distinguish so clearly between the moment when faith began and baptism took place as we do (see on v. 5). The past nature of Christ's own resurrection would also lend momentum to the acceptance of the past nature of that of believers. The idea may also be implicit in the pre-Ephesian and probably non-Pauline hymn of 5:14.<sup>821</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> For discussions of the formula see E. Lohmeyer, 'Σὺν Χριστῷ' in *Festgabe für A. Deissmann* (ed. K. L. Schmidt), Tübingen, 1927, 218–57; W. T. Hahn, *Das Mitsterben und Mitaufstehen mit Christus bei Paulus*, Gütersloh, 1937; J. Dupont, ΣΨΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩΙ. *L'union avec le Christ suivant saint Paul*, Bruges, 1952; Best, *One Body*, 44–64; O. Küss, *Der Römerbrief*, Regensburg, 1963, 319–81; R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (BZNW 32), Berlin, 1966; E. Schweizer, 'Die "Mystik" des Sterbens und Auferstehens mit Christus bei Paulus', *EvT* 26 (1966) 239–57; id. 'Dying and Rising with Christ', *NTS* 14 (1967/8) 1–14; G. Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the pagan Mysteries*, Edinburgh and London, 1967; R. Schnackenburg, 'Todes- und Lebensgemeinschaft mit Christus' in his *Schriften zum Neuen Testament*, Munich, 1971, 361–91; H. Frankemölle, *Das Taufverständnis des Paulus: Taufe, Tod und Auferstehung nach Röm 6* (SBS 47), Stuttgart, 1970; Siber, op.cit., 191ff; A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Paul and the Hellenistic Mystery-Cults: On Posing the Right Questions' in *La Soteriologia dei culli orientali nell' impero Romano* (ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren), Leiden, 1982, 817–33; id. 'Hellenistic Christian Traditions in Romans 6?', *NTS* 29 (1983) 337–55; id. *Baptism and Resurrection*, passim.

<sup>79</sup> A/Col Author of Colossians

<sup>80</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>810</sup> Cf Best, *One Body*, 46; Tannehill, op.cit., 41–3.

<sup>821</sup> Cf Siber, op.cit., 200–2.

The transfer of believers from the death of sin and the realm of the devil is expressed more strongly in v. 6 than elsewhere in the N<sup>83</sup>T when it is said that believers have sat down with Christ in the heavenlies. In other places their reign is set in the future (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5; cf 1 Cor 6:2f; 1 Pet 2:9;<sup>842</sup> Mt 13:43; Rom 8:17, 30). Believers are distinguished from Christ in that they are not said to sit at God's right hand.

A number of factors contributed to the N<sup>85</sup>T teaching on the heavenly session of the saints: (1) apocalyptic sayings, e.g. Dan 7:18, 22, 27; *I En* 108:12; (ii) the saying of Jesus underlying Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30 (the idea is present in Mk 10:37); (3) the targumic development of Exod 19:6;<sup>863</sup> (4) the angels, or holy ones, and the members of the Qumran community are sometimes grouped together (1QS 11:7f; 1QH 3:21–3; 11:10–12<sup>874</sup>) thus implying the presence of the members of the community in heaven; (5) the unity of believers with Christ who has already taken his seat in heaven (1:20). It is this last factor which was the most important for Christians. All this makes it unnecessary to suppose with Reitzenstein the influence of the concept of baptism as a heavenly journey<sup>885</sup> the evidence for which is relatively late (e.g. the Mandaean literature); Schlier points to the *Odes of Solomon* but these may have been affected by Christianity.

Colossians and Ephesians share the idea of a past resurrection of believers with Christ, and in Ephesians it is impossible to decide whether A<sup>89</sup>E thought the moment when this took place was that of faith or baptism (see v. 5). In accepting a past ascension of believers, A<sup>90</sup>E goes beyond Colossians which in 3:3 says only that believers are now hidden with God. It is however logical to accept ascension with Christ once a past resurrection with him has been accepted. In this A<sup>91</sup>E may have advanced beyond Colossians through his greater interest in the ascension of Christ (1:20–3; 4:8) and a desire to preserve a parallel with 1:20; it is moreover not out of keeping with his belief that the church is active in the heavenlies (3:10), where it has access to God (2:18), and with 2:19, if the 'saints' there are the inhabitants of heaven. However, in 1 Cor 4:8 Paul spoke scornfully of some who believed that they were already reigning as kings; the claim of some Corinthian believers to speak with the tongues of angels may also indicate a belief that they were already in heaven. It is improbable that what Paul attacks here represents a pre-Pauline belief against which he contends in Rom 6:1ff by arguing for a future resurrection with Christ.<sup>926</sup> In 2 Tim 2:18 the belief that resurrection is already past is condemned as heretical.<sup>937</sup> Was there then a division among disciples of Paul in that some moved towards a

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<sup>83</sup>NT *Novum Testamentum*

<sup>842</sup> Cf Best, 'I Peter II 4–10—A Reconsideration', *NT* 11 (1969) 270–93.

<sup>85</sup>NT *Novum Testamentum*

<sup>863</sup> See J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy* (SupNT 12), Leiden, 1966, 50ff.

<sup>874</sup> Cf Mussner, 'Beiträge', 200–3.

<sup>885</sup> R. Reitzenstein, *Die Vorgeschichte des christlichen Taufe*, Leipzig, 1929, 104f, 167ff; Wagner, *op.cit.*, 21ff, gives a full literary documentation.

<sup>89</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>90</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>91</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>926</sup> Cf Wedderburn, 'Paul and the Hellenistic Mystery-Cults'.

<sup>937</sup> On the acceptance and development of the idea see Lona, 374–418.

more realised soteriology than others?<sup>948</sup> If so, were there those, including Paul if he had still been alive, who would have condemned what A<sup>95</sup>E writes as heretical since he affirms a past resurrection and present session in the heavenlies? Before we turn to consider this we should realise that this is no one-off statement by A<sup>96</sup>E for, as we have seen, it accords with 3:10 and 2:19. Believers live simultaneously in two spheres, earth and heaven. (On the soteriology of Ephesians, see Introduction §6:4.)

What is missing from the use of the σὺν formula in Ephesians is any connection with verbs of suffering (Rom 8:17) and dying (Rom 3:4, 6) with Christ. This leaves the impression that A<sup>97</sup>E is concerned too much with seeing Christians as in a position of glory without first passing through suffering (Rom 8:17), an impression reinforced by his failure when he later discusses the behaviour of believers to say anything about what they may have to endure.

Did A<sup>98</sup>E go too far here in speaking of a heavenly session for Christians? In considering this it is wise to remember the particular flavour A<sup>99</sup>E gives to 'in the heavenlies' (see Detached Note: The Heavenlies). These are not the perfect heaven of later Christian thought, but a place where evil powers still fight to maintain their position (6:10ff). A<sup>100</sup>E does not then see believers who sit in the heavenlies as freed from the struggle with evil and sin, and in the second part of his letter he has much advice and exhortation to give to them for this struggle. His teaching on the heavenlies is then at least consistent. The background to Paul's attack in 1 Cor 4:8 on those who claim to reign already is their spiritual enthusiasm. This does not appear to be a danger for A<sup>101</sup>E's recipients; when he comes to spell out charismatic gifts in 4:7, 11 he has difficulty in moving beyond the official ministry! The background to 2 Tim 2:18 is not so clear; the belief of those accused there of heresy may have been generated by the Greek separation of body and soul so that though the body still remains on earth, the soul as perfect rises to immortality. Within the course of church history groups have appeared from time to time claiming to be perfect, an assertion which amounts to much the same as the claim to be already in heaven. It cannot then be surprising to find the idea present at an early stage of the church. It is noticeable that the writer of 2 Timothy moves directly in 2:19 to a demand for moral behaviour. Whatever defence however is put up to explain the meaning of A<sup>102</sup>E's words within his context, it cannot be denied that they are open to wrong deductions; our verse is quoted in gnostic contexts in support of a present spiritual resurrection (*Treat Res I*, 4 45:27; cf 49:16–28). Ephesians may thus be on the way to what ended as gnosticism.

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<sup>9448</sup> The realised nature of the heavenly session of believers goes so much against what we would expect and so differs from Paul that it is not surprising that Bratcher and Nida suggest that translators should insert a phrase like 'as it were'.

<sup>95</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>96</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>97</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>98</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>99</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>100</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>101</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>102</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

What does A<sup>103</sup>E mean by sitting in the heavenlies? In 1:20 Christ's seat in the heavenlies implies his superiority to the powers; in the heavenlies he occupies a position of authority, he reigns. We should expect the same to be intended of Christians; they reign,<sup>41049</sup> or rather, to be more precise in view of the use of *σύν*, they participate in Christ's reign. Yet it is not said that believers are exalted to the right hand of God as was Christ. Their position in the heavenlies is not then identical with his.<sup>51050</sup> Perhaps a little more can be learned from 3:10 (see there) where a cosmic role is given to the church (see also 2:7). In 6:10ff believers are offered equipment for exercising authority over evil spiritual powers, for, unlike Christ, Christians so long as they live are still threatened by these powers. It would seem that A<sup>106</sup>E in following through the apparent parallel of rising with Christ and sitting with him has not been able to express adequately what he wished to say and has left himself open to misunderstanding, and that not only in a too realistic sense by gnostics.<sup>51071</sup> More usually the realism has been undervalued; Origen appears to regard what is said as signifying no more than an attitude of mind (c. *Cels* 8:22; *Comm Mt* 10:14); Thomas Aquinas, recognising the past tenses, speaks of the certitude of hope; Chrysostom (ad loc) writes round the problem by speaking of the body of Christ which goes to heaven with Christ its head, and modern attempts to explain it in terms of the anthropos myth in effect do the same. The problem is not new to Christianity for no one supposes that when in Ps 110:1 the king is said to be at God's right hand he was actually sitting there, yet it is basic to the description of the Christian life; on the one hand believers are still plagued by sin; on the other they already reign (Rom 5:17) in a new type of existence. A<sup>108</sup>E is faithful to both sides of this paradox but throughout the letter he tends to stress its second element and 2:6 taken out of the context of the letter is open to serious misunderstanding. Those who stress the first element also look forward more consistently to a future eschatological realisation of the

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<sup>103</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>10449</sup> 2:6 implies all Christians will sit with Christ in the heavenlies yet Mt 19:28 suggests that only the Twelve will reign there. Has a function originally restricted to them been widened here or has one intended for all been narrowed in Matthew? Mt 19:28 may not be the form of Jesus' original logion; in the parallel of Lk 22:30 the number of thrones is undetermined; the saying may then have been spoken originally to all followers of Jesus (cf G. Schmahl, *Die Zwölf im Markusevangelium*, Trier, 1974, 29–36). Once the 'overlordship' of the Twelve was stressed, the saying was restricted to them: prior to that it had penetrated the Christian tradition in the wider sense as we see from 1 Cor 6:2f; Rom 5:17; 2 Tim 2:12 (if this is an early fragment), and even into heretical Christianity as shown by 1 Cor 4:8. If Mt 19:28 correctly reproduces the original logion then we must see both the wider (the disciples) and the narrower (the Twelve) concepts as present from almost the beginning. A certain incompatibility has continued to exist between them.

<sup>10550</sup> Mk 10:35–9 implies all who reach heaven will have seats.

<sup>106</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>10751</sup> Some church Fathers also spoke over-realistically of the newly baptised as transferred to paradise but they balanced this with an emphasis on the progress the baptised needed to make; cf J. H. Bernard, 'The Odes of Solomon', *JTS* 12 (1910/11) 1–31.

<sup>108</sup> AE Author of Ephesians

second. The future is not stressed by A<sup>109</sup>E but it has not fully disappeared (e.g. 1:14, 18; 2:21; 4:4, 15f, 30; 5:5, 16, 21).

A<sup>110</sup>E qualifies the verbs in two ways: the first qualification, 'in the heavenlies', applies only to the second verb and is necessitated by the parallelism with 1:20. The second, 'in Christ Jesus', qualifies both and may have been drawn in through its association with 'in the heavenlies' in 1:3. It does not imply that  $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu$  has changed its meaning in v. 6 from v. 5, as if Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians rise together with one another in Christ Jesus.<sup>51112</sup> The existence of the  $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu$  formula in many compounds in the earlier Paulines excludes such a change in meaning; it would also be strange to find the preposition varying in meaning between v. 5 and v. 6 since there is no more here than in v. 5 to suggest A<sup>112</sup>E has the unification of Jewish and Gentile Christians in mind. The linking of the  $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu$  and the 'in Christ' formulae is unusual.<sup>51133</sup> The latter formula sets out Christ as the 'place' where God acts for us whereas the former supplies the sense of fellowship with Christ. Such an interpretation accords with 1:3. It is only because of what God has done in Christ that believers have risen and are seated with him in the heavenlies.<sup>114</sup>

#### *D. New position individually (2:1–10)*

In chapter 1 Paul discussed God's eternal plan in choosing those who are predestined to sonship and the fact that all believers on earth and in heaven will be brought together under Christ the Head of the church. Chapters 2–3 explain the execution of this eternal plan by showing how God makes sinners saints and then places them into the church, Christ's body. In 2:1–10 Paul discussed how sinners who deserve nothing but God's wrath can become trophies of His grace.

##### **1. THE OLD CONDITION: DEAD TO GOD (2:1–3)**

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<sup>109</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>110</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>11152</sup> Cf Von Soden and Ramaroson, art.cit.

<sup>112</sup>AE Author of Ephesians

<sup>11353</sup> On the relation of the two formulae see Frankemölle, op.cit., 116–20; Best, *One Body*, 59–63.

<sup>114</sup> Ernest Best, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians\*](#), International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998), 213–223.



At the outset it should be noted that the grammatical subject of this long sentence (vv. 1–7) in Greek is “God” (v. 4) and the three main verbs are “made ... alive with” (v. 5), “raised ... up with” (v. 6), and “seated ... with” (v. 6). The object of each of these verbs is “us,” that is, believers (vv. 5–6). Thus the main assertion in verses 1–7 is that God has made believers alive, raised them up, and seated them with Christ. All the other clauses in these verses are subordinate to this main assertion. This is not really clear in the NI<sup>115</sup>V which has included three additional verbs (one in v. 1 and two in v. 3) as well as the three, already mentioned, in verses 5–6.

Verses 1–3 depict the condition of unbelievers before God transformed them.

*a. The condition described (2:1).*

2:1. Unregenerate persons are **dead in ... transgressions** (cf. v. 5) **and sins** (Col. 2:13). This death is spiritual, not physical, for unsaved people are very much alive physically. Death signifies absence of communication with the living. One who is dead spiritually has no communication with God; he is separated from God. The phrase “in your transgressions and sins” shows the sphere of the death, suggesting that sin has killed people (Rom. 5:12; 7:10; Col. 2:13) and they remain in that spiritually dead state. “Transgressions” (*paraptōmasin*, “false steps”; cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:5) and “sins” (*hamartia is*, “acts of missing the mark”), though slightly different in their root meanings, are basically synonymous. Both suggest deliberate acts against God and His righteousness and thus failure to live as one should. The plural of these two nouns signifies people’s repetitious involvement in sin and hence their state of unregeneration.

*b. The condition delineated (2:2–3).*

2:2–3. Mankind’s unregenerate condition is further delineated in three ways: (1) The unregenerate follow **the ways of this world**. Unbelievers follow the lifestyles of other unbelievers; they experience the world’s peer pressure. “This world” (*kosmos*) is the satanically organized system that hates and opposes all that is godly (cf. John 15:18, 23).

(2) The unsaved follow **the ruler of the kingdom of the air**, that is, Satan. “The whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19), also called “the god of this Age” (2 Cor. 4:4). In the middle of the Tribulation he will be cast down to the earth, no longer to rule the world or have access to God’s presence (Rev. 12:9). The unsaved are now in the clutches of this “ruler” and follow in his opposition to God.

(3) The additional description, **the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient**, may be a further elaboration of the distant antecedent, “ways of this world,” but this seems too remote. Some (e.g., NI<sup>116</sup>V) suggest that it refers to “the ruler,” meaning that Satan personally works in sons of disobedience. However, it seems that “the spirit” is the same as “the kingdom (*exousias*, lit. ‘authority’) of the air.” This is the nearest antecedent and makes sense grammatically. This “spirit” then refers to the impersonal force or atmosphere, which is controlled and directed by Satan (1 John 5:19). This spirit is presently “at work” (*energountos*) in

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<sup>115</sup>NIV New International Version

<sup>116</sup>NIV New International Version

unbelievers. “In those who are disobedient” is literally, “in the sons of disobedience.” The word for sons (*huiōis*) has the idea of a distinctive characteristic. “A son of disobedience” is one who is a distinctly disobedient person. The Greek word translated “disobedience” and “disobedient” is used several times in the New Testament (Rom. 11:30, 32; Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Heb. 4:6, 11). It suggests conscious and active rebellion and opposition against God.

However, the unconverted not only are under the pressure of the world system and Satan’s control but they also enjoy it. **All of us also lived among them at one time** is Paul’s reminder to his Gentile readers that the Jews (“all of us”) also joined in this disobedience. The word “lived” (*anestrophēmen*; “conducted themselves”) differs from “used to live” (*periepatēsate*) in Ephesians 2:2. The conduct of the unsaved is in the sphere of **the cravings of their sinful nature**, in which they follow the **desires and the thoughts** of the flesh. “Sinful nature” translates “the flesh” (*sarkos*), which is unregenerated nature. This nature can manifest itself in a respectable form as well as in disreputable pursuits. The “thoughts” (*dianoia*, here pl<sup>117</sup>, but usually sing<sup>118</sup>.) suggest that even unbelievers’ reasoning processes (or calculations formed by a thinking mind) are perverted. Such false reasoning directs their wills and acts (cf. Rom. 1:21).

**Like the rest, we** (i.e., both Jews and Gentiles) are **by nature** (naturally and innately) the **objects** (lit. “children”) **of wrath**. *tekna*, the word for “children,” suggests a close relationship to one’s parents (in contrast with *huiōi*, “sons,” which speaks of distinctive characteristics). Unbelievers have a close relationship, not with God, but with His wrath! Disobedience and unbelief lead to the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18–2:29; John 3:36).

Ephesians 2:1–3 presents a hopeless picture of an unregenerate person who deserves nothing but God’s wrath.

## 2. THE NEW POSITION: ALIVE IN GOD (2:4–10)

The wrath of God, however, is not the entire story. Its dark background contrasts with the glorious exhibition of God’s grace toward the unregenerate. Verses 4–10 set forth the grace of God which works on some unbelievers and gives them life (vv. 4–5), raises them (v. 6a), and seats them in heavenly realms with Christ (vv. 6b–10).

### a. God made them alive (2:4–5).

2:4–5. The conjunction **but** introduces God’s actions toward sinners, in contrast with their plight in verses 1–3. In the Greek text **God** immediately follows “but,” thus placing it in an emphatic position. “God” is the subject of the whole passage. Great differences are suggested by the words “But God”! He is described as **rich in mercy**. (Cf. the “riches” of God’s grace [1:7; 2:7], of God’s glorious inheritance [1:18], of Christ [3:8], and of His glory [3:16].) In the Septuagint “mercy” (*eleos*) translates the Hebrew *hesed* (“loyal love”). In the New Testament *eleos* means “undeserved kindness” toward sinners. Thus God, who is rich in exhibiting this undeserved kindness, acts on behalf of sinners **because of His great love for us**. The noun for “love” (*agapē*) comes from the verb *agapaō* that means “to seek the highest good in the one

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<sup>117</sup>pl. plural

<sup>118</sup>sing. singular

loved.” Since sinners are spiritually dead toward God, they have nothing to commend them to God. This is why Paul described this love as being “great.”

God’s love has done three things: (a) **made us alive with Christ**, (b) “raised us up with Christ” (2:6), and (c) “seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (v. 6). An unbeliever, spiritually dead, is “made ... alive” by God “with (in association with) Christ” (cf. Col. 2:13). The “us” includes both Jews and Gentiles (cf. “us” in Eph. 2:3–4). The only way a spiritually dead person can communicate with God is to be made alive, and that must be done by the One who is Himself alive. He is the living God, “who gives life to the dead” (Rom. 4:17).

God is fully aware of the unbelievers’ state. It was clearly described in Ephesians 2:1–3 and is repeated here: **even when we were dead in transgressions** (cf. v. 1). This act of God in making the unregenerate alive is an act of grace: **it is by grace you have been saved**. Paul elaborated on this last statement, which is actually parenthetical, in verse 8. The verb “have been saved” is in the perfect tense which expresses the present permanent state as a result of a past action. Because believers have been “made alive” spiritually with Christ, they have been and are saved.

*b. God raised them (2:6a).*

2:6a. Besides being made alive, former unbelievers also have been **raised ... up with Christ**. This speaks of their being positionally resurrected. Christ’s post-resurrection state was new, powerful, and unique. So too Christians, in whom Christ dwells, have a new, powerful, and unique life and position. This new life, power, and position demand that believers have a new set of values, as Paul stated in his companion letter to the Colossian believers: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:1–2).

*c. God seated them (2:6b–10).*

2:6b. Not only has God made alive and raised with Christ many who had been unbelievers, but He has also **seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms** (cf. 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) **in Christ Jesus**. Believers are positioned spiritually in heaven, where Christ is. They are no longer mere earthlings; their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). He is the exalted Son of God, and they are exalted sons and daughters of God. These actions of God toward unbelievers are similar to what God did for Christ: “He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 1:20). Whereas Christ had died physically (1:20), unbelievers were dead spiritually (2:1–3). While Christ was raised physically (1:20), unbelievers are made alive and raised with Christ spiritually (2:5–6). Christ is seated in the heavenly realms physically (in His resurrected, ascended body; 1:20), but believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms spiritually (2:6). This divine power that can make an unbeliever have life, be raised, and exalted with Christ is the same power that presently operates in believers.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, [“Ephesians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 621–624.