

**Text: Ephesians 2:1-10**  
**Theme: Who Is Really in Control?**  
**Date: November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014**  
**Preacher: Nathan Loersch**

If you go on your computer or phone and look up “Who is in control,” you will find more answers than you ever thought possible. The internet will try to tell you who is in control of the countries of Syria, Iraq, and North Korea. It will try to tell you who controls the US senate, the media, who controls the internet, the economy, and who or what is simply in control of the world.

If you then look up “Who is in control of the world?” The internet will tell you all about different secret societies—like the Illuminati, the Freemasons, The Knights Templar, The Priory of Sion. You can read all about the supposed events those organizations have orchestrated over the centuries. But some of those groups never even existed—they’re completely made up!

People crave knowing who is in control, and in fact, they *want* someone to be in control. That’s why fictional novels like *The Da Vinci Code* (a mystery novel from 2003 that sold 80 million copies!) are so popular—people enjoy hearing stories and wondering, “Is it possible that some secret societies have existed throughout history and run the world from behind the scenes?”

Even if you’ve never thought about secret societies, even for a second—you still think about who is in control. You hear your child come home and tell tall tales about the crazy things that happened at school and you wonder, “Does my child’s teacher have control of the kids in the class, or do the kids just talk the whole time and not learn anything?” You read the stories in the newspaper and hear the 6 o’clock news and wonder, “Does law enforcement control the crime in my neighborhood and city, or can criminals do whatever they want?” You watch the nightly news with Brian Williams and wonder, “Is America in control of what’s going on in the world, or is this world really at the mercy of countries like Russia or China, or terrorist groups like Isis?”

People want to know who is in control, because they want to be sure of their own security. They want to be confident that they will be okay. What about *me*? The people living in the city of Ephesus surely wondered the same questions—in 60 A.D. kids acted just like they do today, crime happened in every neighborhood and city, and although Rome seemed to be in control of its empire and the world was a generally peaceful place, people still wondered if some day a new world power might rise up. Who is really in control?

Paul answered their questions by telling them a story. A true story. Paul told the Ephesians *their* story. At the end of chapter 1, Paul had been talking about a huge group of people—the whole church. All of the believers in the entire world. But with the words of our sermon text, Ephesians 2:1-10, he narrowed the spotlight onto the Ephesians themselves. He specifically spoke to each individual person who was hearing his letter read. Verses 1-3 tell us the first part of the story.

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

First Paul says the people were dead in their transgressions and sins. That’s a big problem. You can be sick and get better. You can have a fever or a head cold and sometimes be over it in a day or two. You can have a serious disease and still recover—you can have cancer and beat it. Cancer’s dangerous, but many people survive it. But if you’re dead—there’s no getting better. If you’re dead, it’s all over. No amount of rest, no medicine, no recovery plan is going to cure you. Paul said that the Ephesians were dead in their sins, and also that they were *living* in sin. They were living sinful lives, following the ways of the world and of the ruler of the world—the devil—just like all the other people who were disobedient to God—who rejected Jesus as their Savior. They were living in sin, and also dead in their sin. To be dead in your sins means that there is absolutely *nothing* you can do to get better—nothing you can do to overcome your sins.

And because they were dead in their sins, Paul gives them a grave warning: **“Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”** Sinning has consequences. The person who sins deserves God’s wrath. God’s punishment. It’s not just a slap on the wrist, either. Eternal death in hell. Being dead in your sin is a huge problem. It means you deserve death in hell. What a gut wrenching message Paul seemed to be giving to the Ephesian people. It is a huge problem if you’re dead in your sin.

This problem—Paul didn’t just say it was a problem the Ephesians had. He said, **“All of us lived among them.”** When Paul wrote those words, he surely thought back to *his* earlier days. His days as a Jewish law-abiding, self-saving, Christian-killing Pharisee who thought he was living a great life, until he was knocked to the ground and blinded by Jesus, who told Paul that he was an enemy of God! Paul wrote those words about himself, and he wrote them about us as well.

My friends—you were totally dead in your sin. Same with me—totally dead. We only wanted to serve the devil. All we wanted to do was follow our bad desires—those things I know I shouldn’t do...but then I do them anyways. Every single bad thing I do—it starts inside of me. And what is more—I didn’t care. You...I...we didn’t want anything at all to do with God. We hated him. And so we deserved only eternal death in hell. Think of some of the “worst” people of the last 100 years—Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler—I deserved the exact same thing as them, because I was in the same position as them—dead in my sin. And that is a huge problem. The Ephesians’ story—*our* story—it’s not headed in a good direction.

But look closely at the words again. Follow along with me here: **“You were dead...in which you used to live...when you followed...all of us lived among them at one time...we were by nature deserving of wrath.”** What do all those phrases have in common? All those phrases are past tense! Paul is not saying, “You *are* dead in your sin...you *are* following the ways of the devil...you *are* deserving of eternal death in hell.” Why isn’t Paul saying those things? It doesn’t make sense! We said if you’re dead, you can’t do a single thing to make yourself alive! But Paul isn’t saying you’re dead *now*—he’s only saying you were dead *in the past*! What changed?

Three letters make all the difference here. The beginning of verse 4. “But.” It’s impossible to cure yourself of being dead in your sins! “But.” **“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

“But.” Such a small word—such a big turning point. Paul totally turned the tables from talking about the inability of all people to cure themselves of being dead because of their sin. The Ephesians, Paul himself, and all of us—none of us could make ourselves alive! But in verses 4-9 Paul isn’t talking about what we can or can’t do at all. He is only talking about what God can do. What God *did* do. Paul is saying that when it comes to our eternal fate, we are not in control. God is in control! And that is a great thing!

Let’s go through those verses again—look at all the wonderful things Paul says about God and what *God has done* for us.

1. God has **great love for us**. Love is an integral part of who God is. The Bible even says God *is* love. But not just love in general. Love for me. Love for you.
2. God is **rich in mercy**. Mercy can be defined as “kindness or concern for someone in need.” We were the epitome of in need—we were dead!
3. And because of his love and mercy, God **made us alive with Christ**. The fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead means that we are spiritually alive. God raised us up from being dead in our sins to being alive in Christ.
4. And after **God raised us up with Christ, he seated us with him** in heaven. We are not going to heaven by chance. We won’t just show up and surprise God. It’s like when you go to a restaurant—a place that

takes you to your reserved seat is better than a fast food joint where you just find your own seat. God has prepared and saved a seat in heaven specifically for each one of you. That's how special you are to God.

5. **It is by grace you have been saved.** Grace is God's undeserved love for us. Even though there was absolutely nothing in us that would have ever caused God to love us, he did. God chose to love you.
6. Eternal life is **not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.** And finally, if we didn't quite get what Paul was saying yet—he sums it all up for us yet again. We are saved not by ourselves at all, not by our works, so we can't boast. Eternal life is simply a gift from God! A gift isn't something you earn (no matter how many times we hear from a Santa Claus, 'Have you been a good little girl or boy this year??')—if something is a gift, it means someone just *gave* it to you. That's exactly what God did with eternal life. He simply *gave* it to us. Free of charge. Not because of anything we've done. Just because he loves us.

All of God's actions we just talked about in verses 4-9—they are all in the past tense as well! That's because with God, our eternal life is such a sure thing that to God it is like we are already with him in heaven. There is no greater comfort in the world than that! My friends—your eternal fate is controlled by the one, true, almighty God, who is the most powerful in the universe! And who loves *you*! Leave here today completely at peace, knowing that you are not in charge of earning your eternal life. Your Savior Jesus earned it for you.

Paul wasn't quite done, even after giving us the most comforting news we've ever heard. He gives us one more fact about ourselves, and this fact encourages us in our daily lives. Let's read verse 10. **“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

We could talk about all sorts of good works that we can do to say “thanks” to God for giving us eternal life in heaven, but since we are in the last week of our *Legacy* series, we will just talk about one. Everyone in the world wants someone to be in control of their eternal fate. The problem is, the human desire is that I want *myself* to be in control! Every person wants to do something to earn their own way to heaven. Every major religion besides Christianity—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism—they're all about what *I* can do to get to heaven. Even many Christian churches will fall into the devil's trap of leading people to think they can help get themselves to heaven.

Everyone wants to know who is in control. So let's give them what they want—let's tell them God is in control. God has given you eternal life. Rejoice in that truth! And pass on that legacy, so that others may rejoice in the gift of God's love as well. Amen.