

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Sermon Title: Incomplete Without Christ, Complete with Christ, Ephesians 2:1-9

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**ILLUSTRATION:** The church at Ephesus had a lot of issues that needed to be dealt with. As we press on through Ephesians, I'll be mentioning some of those from time to time. When we studied the Book of Acts, we took a closer look at the issues in Ephesus. The city of Ephesus was quite a city. It was very diverse. It was located in what is modern day Turkey. It was the first outpost of Christianity in Asia. If you want to read more about it, Acts 19 tells us about the evangelization of Ephesus. Paul lived there in the early 50s AD, and he worked to provide for himself and not be a burden on his hosts.

My three points today are:

1. The complete helplessness of people without Christ—
2. People are complete in Christ and nothing else.
3. And, God completes good works through his people.

Paul taught in the synagogue for three months and eventually became frustrated with the Jews who rejected his message, so he found another place and began preaching salvation through Jesus Christ. The Gospel spread quickly. He wrote this letter to them about eight to ten years later while he was in jail.

**First, THE COMPLETE HELPLESSNESS OF PEOPLE WITHOUT GOD—**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 2:1-3 <sup>1</sup>*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,* <sup>2</sup>*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.* <sup>3</sup>*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.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul told the people of the church at Ephesus about their lives before becoming believers in Jesus Christ. He speaks of death. They were dead in

transgressions and sin, but in verse 2, he said, "*in which you used to live.*" In other words, they were physically alive in their death. They were physically alive in their spiritually lost state, but they were alive with no hope.

And, what were they doing? Following Satan, who was at work in their lives leading them to indulge in whatever they wanted with no restraint.

Paul gave the value of life in the spiritually lost state: deserving of wrath. Without Christ, there is no hope whatsoever for mankind. Any goodness in those who do not know Christ is because of Christ.

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 53:2-3 <sup>2</sup> *God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.* <sup>3</sup> *Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

**SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 7:20 <sup>20</sup> *Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.*

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 3:10-12 <sup>10</sup> *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

**QUESTION:** Why did Paul remind the Ephesian Christians of their lives before they came to Christ? Probably to remind them of where they'd come from and because he was building toward something.

**EXPLANATION:** Ephesus was a large city, and deeply religious. A man named Demetrius lived there. He was a silversmith, and he told everyone how Paul's message about Jesus Christ was a threat to their businesses. The whole city was in an uproar.

If a city was caught up in idol worship (by "idol," I mean actual idols), then no doubt many of them had a background in trying to manipulate an idol through rituals. If any of that was on the minds of the Ephesians, Paul was quick to point out no one was righteous and that there was nothing a person could do on his or her own to become righteous before God.

Paul preached this when he lived in Ephesus, and now a few years later, he told them again in his letter.

I just covered the complete helplessness of people without God, next we have—

**Second, PEOPLE ARE COMPLETE IN CHRIST AND NOTHING ELSE.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 2:4-7 <sup>4</sup>*But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** Having established no one is righteous, Paul went on to explain how a person comes to Christ. "*God who is rich in mercy*" – it all starts with God. Circle the phrase "rich in mercy" in verse 4. We cannot get to him when we are spiritually dead in our transgressions.

Mercy is that we do not get what we deserve. If a person says, "Please have mercy," that person is pleading not to get what is deserved. Verse 3 tells us we are all deserving of God's wrath, but immediately following that, verse 4 tells us we don't get what we deserve, wrath, because of Christ.

Go to verse 7, and circle the phrase "riches of his grace." Grace is different than mercy. Grace is what we get that we do not deserve. As Paul tells it, we are seated with Jesus in the heavens. In other words, because of Christ, our status is elevated. We don't deserve that at all.

Here's a quick review:

- We deserve wrath, which we do not get because of God's mercy.
- We do not deserve salvation, but we get it because of God's grace.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 2:8-9 <sup>8</sup>*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

**EXPLANATION:** Faith is the key. It is not works. Earlier, Paul built upon the theme of people being completely unrighteous and therefore unable to save ourselves. God, because of his mercy, does not destroy us, and God, because of his grace and our response of believing faith, offers salvation.

There is truth in the statement: "*not by works, so no one can boast...*" You know, people in general like to be recognized for their good works. I've known people who served in various ministries and then quit because they felt no one recognized their good work. Of course, we need to recognize people for their service, but we shouldn't serve in order to be recognized.

**APPLICATION:** I am convinced there are a very large number of people who feel they are earning their salvation by working for it. Many believe their church attendance counts toward salvation, as well as their gifts, and as well as their volunteerism. Others believe their inherent overall goodness is a good vetting tool for salvation.

One time after preaching this passage which clearly says, "*not of works,*" a woman scolded me and said, "It's what you do for him that will get you there, and don't you forget it." Listen to me — everyone! The Bible makes it clear: (1) We are sinners deserving of God's wrath, and (2) Salvation is because of God's grace! It's right here in Ephesians 2:8 and 9, and it's really clear!

**ILLUSTRATION:** When I was in college, I did some contract work for a man. I worked around his home and for his business. We had numerous spiritual talks, and one day, he asked me about his good works getting him into heaven. He gave the illustration of giving money to the local zoo so children could enjoy seeing the zoo animals. Listen to me folks, if you think giving to the zoo or to anything else earns you points for salvation, you are sadly mistaken.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to remove the blinders from you, so you will be able to understand the simple language and rich truth found in this verse. Listen closely, once again:

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 2:8-9 <sup>8</sup>*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —* <sup>9</sup>*not by works, so that no one can boast.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** When I recruited chaplains for the military, one of the things I did was make sure people met the requirements. The qualifying degree was the Master of Divinity. Very often, as in everyday, people tried to get in with the wrong degree. They said, "My degree is like a Master of Divinity," and they would continue to explain away. I finally got the point where I'd interrupt and said, "I'm sorry, if you don't have the qualifying degree, please call me back when you do." And, then their lengthy emails followed. It amazed me how people thought they met the requirements when they did not.

**CONCLUSION:** The scripture says right here that the requirement of salvation is "faith" in response to God's extending of his grace.

If you are listening to me today and think you've done even one good work that earns you salvation, you've deceived yourself into believing a lie, and it's time to accept the truth.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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