

Ephesians – Week 5 – But God – Bible Study Helps

Title: But God

Sermon Summary: This Palm Sunday sermon explores Ephesians 2:1-10, contrasting humanity's desperate spiritual condition with God's merciful intervention. The message emphasizes that before salvation, all people were dead in trespasses and sins, ruled by worldly pressures, spiritual bondage from the devil, and internal corruption. The sermon pivots on the phrase "but God," highlighting how God's rich mercy and great love intervened when humanity was completely helpless. God doesn't rehabilitate sinners but recreates them into new creatures with glorious purpose. The message concludes by affirming that salvation is entirely by grace through faith, not of works, and that believers are now God's workmanship created for good works that bring Him glory.

Key Points:

- Humanity's lost condition: dead in trespasses and sins, unable to save themselves
- Three enemies that ruled our old life: the world system, the devil (prince of the power of the air), and the sinful flesh
- We were by nature children of wrath, guilty criminals against God
- The phrase "but God" represents divine interruption when human ability, hope, and strength reach their limit
- God is rich in mercy and demonstrated great love even when we were dead in sins
- Salvation never begins with man reaching upward but with God reaching down
- God made us alive (quickened us), raised us up, and seated us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus
- Salvation is entirely by grace through faith, not of works, so no one can boast
- It is the free gift of God that must be received, not earned
- Believers are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works
- In ages to come, God will display believers as examples of His exceeding grace and kindness

Scripture Reference:

- Ephesians 2:1-10 (primary passage)
- Ephesians 1:18-23 (context from previous chapter)
- 1 John 2:15-17 (love not the world)
- 1 Peter 5:8 (the devil as adversary)
- Romans 7:18 (in my flesh dwells no good thing)

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- John 3 (must be born again; God so loved the world)
- Romans 5:8 (God commended His love toward us)
- Romans 5:12 (sin entered through one man)
- Genesis 50:20 (Joseph: you meant evil, but God meant it for good)
- Acts 13:30 (they crucified Him, but God raised Him)
- Psalm 73:26 (my flesh fails, but God is my strength)
- 1 Corinthians 10:13 (but God is faithful in temptation)

Stories:

- Reference to the Prodigal Son's father running to meet his son, illustrating mercy coming running
- Joseph's story: his brothers meant evil against him, but God meant it unto good (Genesis 50:20)
- The pastor's personal testimony of remembering when he was lost and the day he trusted Christ, when "mercy came running"
- Palm Sunday narrative: Jesus riding into Jerusalem knowing the people celebrating Him would soon cry "crucify Him," yet He came anyway, demonstrating God's mercy
- Illustration of a dead fish flowing downstream versus a live fish swimming upstream, representing the difference between following the world's course and living as a Christian
- Reference to Eve's temptation in the Garden (lust of flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life)
- Reference to Jesus' temptation in Luke 4 (same three categories of temptation)
- David's fall with Bathsheba (lust of the flesh)
- Moses striking the rock in anger (flesh manifesting as anger)

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Discipleship Questions

How does understanding that we were 'dead in trespasses and sins' before salvation change the way you view God's mercy and grace in your life?

The sermon describes three enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Which of these three do you find most challenging in your daily walk with Christ, and why?

What does it mean practically that believers are already 'seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' while still living on earth?

The phrase 'but God' appears at critical moments when human ability reaches its limit. Can you identify a 'but God' moment in your own life when He intervened?

How should the reality that we are God's 'workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works' shape our daily priorities and decisions?

Salvation is entirely a gift with no works involved. Why do you think people still struggle to accept this truth and try to add their own efforts?

In what ways are you currently following 'the course of this world' rather than standing up for Christ and going against the cultural current?

How does remembering your lost condition before salvation affect your compassion and urgency in sharing the gospel with others?

God will use believers as eternal examples of His kindness in the ages to come. How does this future reality impact how you view your present struggles and sanctification?

Are you living as though you truly believe that God is 'rich in mercy' with unlimited compassion, or do you live as if His grace might run out?

Small Group Guide:

"But God" - Ephesians 2:1-10

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when someone showed you unexpected mercy or kindness when you didn't deserve it. How did that make you feel?

Key Scripture

Ephesians 2:1-10 (Read aloud together)

Main Points Summary

1. What We Were (Verses 1-3)

- Dead in trespasses and sins
- Ruled by three enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh
- Children of wrath by nature

2. But God (Verse 4)

- The doctrine of divine interruption
- God's rich mercy and great love
- God intervenes when we are helpless

3. What God Did (Verses 5-10)

- Made us alive (quicken) together with Christ
 - Raised us up and seated us in heavenly places
 - Saved us by grace through faith (a gift, not works)
 - Created us as His workmanship for good works
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Discussion Questions

Understanding Our Condition (15-20 minutes)

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1. **The Reality of Sin:** The Bible describes us before Christ as "dead in trespasses and sins." Why do you think Paul uses such strong language? How does this description challenge our culture's view of human nature?
2. **Three Enemies:** Discuss the three enemies mentioned:
 - **The World:** How does "the course of this world" influence us today? What are some specific examples?
 - **The Devil:** In what ways does the "prince of the power of the air" work through modern media and technology?
 - **The Flesh:** How do you see "the lust of the flesh" and "the desires of the mind" playing out in daily life?
3. **Children of Wrath:** The Bible says we are "by nature the children of wrath." How does this truth contrast with the world's message that people are basically good?

The Power of "But God" (15-20 minutes)

4. **Divine Interruption:** Share a personal testimony of when God interrupted your life. What were you like before Christ? What changed?
5. **Rich in Mercy:** The Bible says God is "rich in mercy" with unlimited compassion. When have you experienced God's mercy in a tangible way this past week or month?
6. **The Pattern:** The sermon showed that "but God" appears when:
 - Man is helpless
 - Evil seems to win
 - Human strength fails
 - Truth is hidden

Which of these scenarios resonates most with where you are right now? Why?

7. **For His Great Love:** Read verse 4 again. Why is it significant that God acted "for His great love wherewith He loved us"? How does knowing God's motivation affect your response to Him?

Living as God's Workmanship (15-20 minutes)

8. **Grace Through Faith:** Verses 8-9 are clear that salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast." Why do you think people still try to earn salvation? How would you explain grace to someone who thinks they need to do something to be saved?
9. **Already Seated:** The sermon explained that believers are already "seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." How should this reality affect:
 - How we view our problems?
 - How we face temptation?
 - Our confidence in our salvation?
10. **God's Workmanship:** Verse 10 says we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works."
 - What does it mean that we are God's "masterpiece"?
 - How does being saved FOR good works differ from being saved BY good works?
 - What good works has God prepared for you to walk in?

Personal Reflection Questions (5-10 minutes)

Have each person spend a few minutes in silent reflection on these questions:

1. **Am I living like I remember who I was?** Do I take my salvation for granted, or do I live with gratitude for God's intervention in my life?
 2. **Where am I being influenced?** Which of the three enemies (world, devil, flesh) is having the most influence on me right now?
 3. **Am I fulfilling my purpose?** Am I walking in the good works God prepared for me, or am I living for myself?
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose ONE of the following to focus on this week:

1. **Gratitude Practice:** Each day this week, write down one specific thing about your salvation that you're grateful for. Share with the group next time.
 2. **Identify Worldly Influences:** Make a list of the top 5 influences in your life (social media, TV shows, friends, podcasts, etc.). Honestly evaluate: Are these drawing you closer to God or pulling you toward the world?
 3. **Memorize Scripture:** Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9. Write it on a card and review it daily.
 4. **Share Your "But God" Story:** Intentionally share your testimony with at least one person this week—how God intervened in your life.
 5. **Serve in Your Workmanship:** Identify one "good work" God has prepared for you and take a concrete step toward doing it this week.
 6. **Examine Your Flesh:** Keep a journal for three days noting when you feel tempted to fulfill "the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Pray specifically about these areas and ask for God's strength.
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Group Prayer Time (10-15 minutes)

Prayer Focus:

- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for His mercy and grace in saving us when we were dead in our sins.
- **Intercession:** Pray for those in your life who are still "dead in trespasses and sins" and need God's intervention.

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- **Surrender:** Ask God to help you resist the world, the devil, and the flesh this week.
- **Purpose:** Pray that each person would walk in the good works God has prepared for them.

Prayer Method: Break into groups of 2-3 and pray for each other's specific needs related to today's discussion.

For Further Study

Additional Passages to Read:

- Romans 5:6-11 (God's love demonstrated while we were sinners)
- Romans 3:21-26 (Righteousness through faith)
- Titus 3:3-7 (Saved by His mercy, not our works)
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 (New creation in Christ)
- 1 John 2:15-17 (Love not the world)

Questions for Personal Study:

1. Read through the book of Ephesians this week. How many times does Paul emphasize what we have "in Christ"?
 2. Study other "but God" passages mentioned in the sermon (Genesis 50:20, Acts 7:9, Acts 13:30, Psalm 73:26). What pattern do you see?
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Closing Thought

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9

Remember: You were dead, BUT GOD made you alive. You were hopeless, BUT GOD intervened. You were destined for wrath, BUT GOD showed mercy. Live this week as His masterpiece, created for good works!

Leader Notes

- **Time Management:** This guide is designed for a 60-90 minute session. Adjust as needed for your group.
- **Sensitive Topics:** Be prepared for discussions about past sins and struggles. Create a safe, non-judgmental environment.

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- **Gospel Clarity:** Be ready to clearly explain the gospel if someone in your group has questions about salvation.
- **Follow-Up:** Check in with group members during the week about their practical application commitments.

5-Day Devotional: But God - Divine Interruption in Our Lives

Day 1: Dead in Trespasses and Sins

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-3

Devotional:

Before Christ, we were spiritually dead—not merely sick or struggling, but utterly lifeless in our trespasses and sins. This passage paints a sobering picture of our former condition: walking according to the world's ways, influenced by Satan, and driven by fleshly desires. We were children of wrath by nature, unable to help ourselves or reach toward God.

Understanding this reality is crucial. A dead person cannot revive themselves, seek light, or respond to truth. This wasn't just "bad behavior" needing modification—it was spiritual death and crimes against a holy God. Yet recognizing our helpless condition prepares our hearts for the glorious intervention that follows.

Reflection: When did you first realize your spiritual condition before Christ? How does remembering your former state increase your gratitude for salvation?

Application: Today, thank God specifically for rescuing you from spiritual death. Share your testimony with someone who needs to hear about God's transforming power.

Day 2: But God - The Divine Interruption

Reading: Ephesians 2:4-7; Romans 5:6-8

Devotional:

"But God"—two of the most powerful words in Scripture. When we were at our lowest, most hopeless point, God intervened. His justice saw our guilt and demanded payment, yet His mercy moved toward us anyway. This divine interruption wasn't based on our worthiness but on His character: rich in mercy, motivated by great love.

Throughout Scripture, "but God" appears when human ability, strength, or hope reaches its limit. When evil seems victorious, but God turns it for good. When we're helpless, but God provides strength. When truth is hidden, but God reveals it. Palm Sunday reminds us that while crowds celebrated Jesus for political deliverance, He came knowing their rejection, yet came anyway—mercy running toward those who didn't deserve it.

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Reflection: Where in your life do you need "but God" to intervene today? What impossibility are you facing that only divine interruption can resolve?

Application: Identify one area where you've reached your limit. Surrender it completely to God, asking Him to intervene with His mercy and power.

Day 3: Rich in Mercy, Great in Love

Reading: Ephesians 2:4-5; Lamentations 3:22-23; John 3:16

Devotional:

God's mercy is unlimited—an inexhaustible supply for guilty people who deserve judgment. No sinner has ever exhausted divine mercy. God's mercies are new every morning because we need them every morning. His mercy withholds deserved punishment while simultaneously deciding to help those who don't deserve it.

But mercy doesn't act alone—it's motivated by love. "For His great love wherewith He loved us" explains why God intervened. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Even when we were dead in sins, His love pursued us. Even when we were His enemies, Christ died for us. This isn't sentimental affection but sacrificial, determined love that reaches into our darkness.

Reflection: How have you experienced God's mercy this week? In what ways has His love pursued you even when you felt unworthy?

Application: Extend mercy to someone who has wronged you, reflecting the mercy God has shown you. Let God's love overflow through you to others.

Day 4: Made Alive Together with Christ

Reading: Ephesians 2:5-6; Colossians 3:1-4

Devotional:

God didn't merely improve our condition—He completely recreated us. He quickened (made alive) those who were spiritually dead, raised us up, and seated us together with Christ in heavenly places. This isn't future hope alone; it's present reality. The moment you trusted Christ, you were spiritually positioned in heaven with Him.

As Christ's body, we go where our Head goes. Since He's already seated far above all principality and power, so are we—positionally secure in Him. Physically, we're still on earth,

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but spiritually, we're already in heavenly places. This means our salvation is as secure as Christ's position at God's right hand.

In ages to come, God will point to us as His example of exceeding grace and kindness. Not because of anything we did, but because of what He accomplished through Christ.

Reflection: How does knowing you're already seated in heavenly places with Christ change your perspective on current struggles?

Application: Live today with heaven's perspective. Make one decision based on your heavenly position rather than earthly circumstances.

Day 5: Saved by Grace Through Faith

Reading: Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7

Devotional:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Salvation is entirely God's work—a free gift that must be received, not earned. Grace means unmerited favor; faith means trusting Christ completely. No baptism, church membership, good works, or money can purchase what God freely offers.

But salvation isn't the end—it's the beginning. We are His workmanship (masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works. God saved us from something (death and wrath) and for something (purpose and glory). He transforms dead sinners into beautiful designs, vessels capable of bringing Him glory.

We were created with divine purpose—to walk in good works God prepared beforehand. Not to earn salvation, but because we're saved.

Reflection: Have you truly received God's free gift, or are you still trying to earn it? What good works has God prepared for you to walk in?

Application: If you've never trusted Christ alone for salvation, do so today. If you're saved, identify one specific way you can fulfill your purpose by serving God this week.

Closing Prayer:

Father, thank You for intervening in human history and in my personal story. When I was dead in sins, You made me alive. When I was helpless, You provided salvation. When I deserved wrath, You showed mercy. Help me live worthy of this calling, bringing You glory through the good works You've prepared for me. May I never forget what I was and what You've made me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.