

# Ephesians Chapter Two

## WHAT WE ARE SAVED FROM (2:1-3)

- **The exciting thing about the resurrection power of Jesus is that it leads to our own resurrection power as we trust in Jesus.**
  - We have seen in the previous few verses that the power that is available to us flows out of the resurrection of Jesus. Now we see what effect this power has on us personally.
  - It took power to get Jesus who was dead, buried and sealed in a tomb to become the Jesus who is resurrected, exalting and ruling everything - totally vibrantly alive! And it takes power to get sinners who are dead in their sin to become vibrantly alive in Christ - the same kind of power!

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 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. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature [a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

These verses explore five aspects of the human condition outside of God's saving grace in Christ...

- **1) Death:** We were spiritually dead.
  - 'As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins'
  - The very first verse implies that God has now made us alive, which is why many translations here say, 'And God made you alive, though you were dead...'
  - What is wrong with humanity? The deepest problem is not our lack of education, our lack of morality, our poor upbringing or our failure to go to church. It is this: we are, in the depths of our beings, unresponsive to God as he really is. Yes, some people have ideas about God and yes, some people think they like God, but in the depths of our being we are unresponsive to God as he really is! We may feel spiritual, and have a religion or some kind of spirituality, but we fail to see and long for God as he really is!
- **2) World:** We used to follow the ways of the world.
  - '2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world'
  - The world here does not refer to the earth, but rather to corrupted humanity.
  - As all humans were spiritually dead, their individual rebellions against God became a collective rebellion against God (much like

the child's swimming-pool game, whirlpool). The whole atmosphere we lived in, our very culture, was anti-God.

- 3) **Devil:** We used to be under the influence of the evil one.
  - '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.'
  - Back behind the disobedience of humanity is the influence of the evil one. We followed his ways. He worked to not only keep us blind to who God really is, but also to start living in his ways. That is why we see so much of the character of the devil at work in lives and societies.
  
- 4) **Disobedience:** We were in the grip of sin.
  - '3 All of us also lived among them (i.e. the children of obedience) at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.'
  - Our very nature was so damaged and ruined by sin that we were addicted to disobedience.
  - Our sinful nature = refers to the pull in our lives to sin. Outside of grace we could not resist the various pulls to sin.
  - Our sinful nature pervaded our entire personality and body:
    - It produced cravings, which we gratified.
    - It produced desires, which we followed.
    - It produced thoughts, which we followed.
  - This does not mean that we were all wicked in the same way -for some people it would manifest, for example, in self-righteousness (where the sins were more in the attitude) and for some in moral depravity (where the sins were more in the body).
  
- 5) **Wrath:** We were under God's anger against sin.
  - 'Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.'
  - Since God is a holy God who is worthy of all glory and who created us to worship and enjoy him and to be sustained by his glory, he is angered by our rebellion, ignorance, hardness of heart, idolatry, and disobedience. If our sin is an unholy hostility to God, then God's wrath is his holy hostility to sin (and therefore sinners).
  - Judgment Day was not looking pretty for us at all - Romans 2 says that he was storing up righteous anger to be revealed on that day against us!

#### WHAT WE ARE SAVED INTO (2:4-7)

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| <p>4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming</p> |
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ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

- **Salvation consists of God taking us out of something dreadful into something amazing.**
  - But = the most powerful word in the English language! Here it shows us what God saves us out of. What God saves us into is awesome, but when against the backdrop of what he saves us out of - it is even more awesome!
- **Salvation consists of God joining us to Christ.**
  - The most common phrase in Paul's writing to describe salvation is 'in Christ.' We are 'in Christ'. This means that we have been spiritually joined to Christ.
- **Salvation consists of God joining us to the resurrected Christ.**
  - We were dead to God - but now we are regenerated and made alive to God. Just like Jesus came out of the tomb alive, so we come out of our spiritual tomb with Christ! His resurrection becomes our resurrection!
  - We have been given a new nature, a new identity, a new centre, a new capacity for God! Our heart of stone (i.e. total insensitivity to God) has been sovereignly replaced with a heart of flesh - a heart that has tenderness toward God as he really is. We were spiritually asleep, but now we have woken up to God.
- **Salvation consists of God joining us to and seating us with the exalted Christ.**
  - Not only did Jesus rise from the dead - he also was exalted where he is now seated.
  - Since salvation is essentially about being in Christ, or being joined to Christ, we have also been joined to the exalted Christ. The fact that we are seated means that
    - 1) we get to co-rule with Christ,
    - 2) we also enjoy the rest of an accomplished work of atonement.
- **Salvation is a result of God's sovereign initiative in our lives.**
  - Our regeneration is the result of the work of God, not our efforts. Before we could even call on Jesus for salvation, God called us. The best picture of this is Jesus calling Lazarus from the dead. God 'calls things that are not as though they were'.
  - We are not saved by our searching, nor by our natural ability to believe, but by God's sovereign movement of grace toward us!
  - There is nothing we did that made us worthy of God moving toward us.
- **Salvation is motivated by God's love, mercy, grace and kindness. This is the cause of salvation.**

- God's love is great. His mercy is rich (v5). His grace is incomparably rich (v7). When God saves us he expresses kindness towards us (v7).
- **Salvation brings God praise forever. This is the effect of salvation: we are wow-ed by God now and forever.**
  - '7 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.'
  - One reason God saves us is that our presence in heaven for all eternity will remind us, and everyone else (and all the angels), that our mere presence there is because of God's undeserved kindness toward us! The grace of God turns us from rebels into worshippers.

### HOW AND WHY WE ARE SAVED (2:8-10)

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- **Salvation is a multifaceted word.**
  - *Saved* - it means rescued and restored; it is the umbrella word that summarises everything in verses 1-7 and includes all that we've been saved out of - and all that we've been saved into.
- **Salvation is by God's grace.**
  - *Grace* - all that God does for us, in us, to us; past, present and future - that is totally undeserved. Grace is God in action toward the undeserving. God's undeserved help - motivated by his own kindness and super-resourcefulness. And it implies his sovereign initiative.
- **Salvation is received through faith.**
  - *Faith* - is the receiving of God's grace. God's grace is his giving and faith is our receiving. BUT even our capacity to receive is God-enabled: we see that faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. That is why it says we are saved 'through' faith and not 'by' faith. Faith is not a work. Salvation is all a work of God! This does not mean that God does the believing for us - no, we believe and receive the grace, but God enables this in us too. That's why all the credit for our salvation is given to God - and we just can't boast.
  - So to bring it together, a paraphrase of 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith' is this: 'God (out of his sovereignty, kindness, generosity and riches) has enabled us to believe in Christ and has rescued us from sin's power, sin's guilt,

death, Satan, God's wrath and has brought us into a place of forgiveness, a new identity in Christ, a new realm altogether, spiritual life, the assurance of heaven and total safety in Jesus!

- **Salvation is decisive and certain.**
  - Notice that a Christian should be sure of their salvation. Paul affirms that they are saved - and casts no doubt on their salvation. Once we have trusted in Christ it does not help us at all to doubt our salvation.
  - One cannot imagine such a decisive work of God being undone by us. Once saved always saved.
  
- **Salvation is not earn-able. No one deserves salvation.**
  - We are not saved by works. This means that we cannot earn our way to salvation through anything we can do. Our bad deeds cannot disqualify us from salvation (unless in the end we refuse the offer of salvation because of our determination to hold onto our bad deeds - see John 3:19) and our good deeds cannot qualify us for salvation.
  - Salvation is God's work for us, to us, in us. Not our work.
  
- **Salvation is being made a new creation of God.**
  - 'We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus'.
  - The Greek word 'workmanship' means 'poeima' from where we get the word 'poetry'. We are God's beautiful creation. This does not refer here to our birth (Psalm 139 tells us that in our birth we are God's beautiful creation) but to our rebirth. We are made new creations! God always creates 'ex-nihilo'. This means 'out of nothing'. When God saved us, he did not find something in us and then re-mould it to salvation. No, he created something that was entirely not there before. Again the emphasis is on the sheer grace and initiative of God toward us.
  
- **Salvation does not *depend* on our good deeds, but it does *result* in good deeds.**
  - We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. Here we see the two main kinds of God's grace. The first kind is *accepting grace* where God takes us as we are - full of sin - and makes us a brand new creation. The second kind of grace is *empowering grace* which flows right out of accepting grace and begins to reshape our lives toward the image of Christ.
  - Now very importantly, since there are two different kinds of grace there are also two different kinds of faith. We receive *accepting, saving grace* through a more kind of passive faith - salvation is God doing something to us, for us, in us - and we receive it. But our faith is far more active when it comes to responding to *empowering grace*. We see this clearly in verse 10 'good works ... for you to do.' God will save us, but God will not do the good works for us - his *empowering grace* will assist us, but we play a very active role in the fulfilment of those good works.

- This is why it is not helpful to make effort the opposite of grace. It is true that we do not receive accepting grace through effort, but empowering grace requires total co-operation, and whole-hearted (but not exhausting) effort. Earning is the opposite of grace, but effort is not!
- **Salvation is God bringing us into partnership with him in Project New Creation.**
  - This repeats and expands upon the thought introduced in 1:10.
  - ‘there are good works that God has planned in advance for you to do’.
  - God is busy reconciling the whole world to Christ - and then realigning everything else that is out of harmony. He is involved in Project New Creation. We are recipients of this New Creation - as we get saved and receive first *accepting grace* but then also *empowering grace*. But we are not just recipients of God’s Project new Creation - we become agents of it, partners with God as he works in the world. He has certain contributions we need to make in the church and in the world.
- **Salvation is the beginning of an unfolding specific destiny with God’s Project New Creation.**
  - Salvation is a tailor-made (God’s the tailor) course of life and deeds that every individual Christian must accomplish by the grace of God.
  - ‘there are good works that God has planned in advance for you to do’.
  - This verse echoes Jeremiah 29:11 - ‘I know the plans I have for you.’ God has plans for us - specific plans.
  - These works are ‘good’ - they bring joy, they are delightful. The way of happiness is the way of God’s will.
  - Very important: these verses are not speaking to individual Christians, but to churches. That is why salvation is being saved into a community of a mission with God. No individual Christian will be able to fulfil their destiny alone. Teaming with other Christians in community is implied.
- **Salvation has two major effects on our lives: it turns us into worshippers (v7) and workers (v10).**
  - In fact the phrases ‘in order that’ (v7) and ‘created us to’ (v10) suggest these are the very reasons God saves us. God saves us because he is motivated by our becoming worshippers (based on accepting grace) and workers (based on empowering grace).
  - We have seen that ultimately what motivates God is love (vs 4) but it is the nature of love to help the beloved become all they can become. And God is not just happy to save us from hell, sin, death - and he’s not just happy to get us into heaven. No his plan is to give us joy of becoming worshippers and workers. And we need his grace to become this - so, not only do we get the joy, but he gets the glory! God’s plan is perfect!

## MAKING ONE OUT OF THE TWO (2:11-18)

- We have seen that God's power is shown in:
  - The resurrection / exaltation of Christ.
  - The resurrection / enlisting of Christians
  - And now (in verses 11-22) in the formation of spiritual communities that consist of people who once hated each other!  
We pick up on this last theme now...
- Eph 1:10 shows that God's agenda is not just the salvation of individuals, but the restoration of all that is fallen apart. In these verses we see that God starts this restoration in his church - and that one major way he 'brings all things together under Christ' is to help people who once hated each other because of differences of culture and race (and it could include class, level of education, temperament, language, nationality or even subculture) to now love each other and accept each other.

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—

- **We must renounce prejudice.**
  - Gentiles were disliked and looked down upon by Jews. Jews were different to Gentiles - and they turned these differences into barriers and reasons for looking down upon and excluding Gentiles. This of course failed to reflect the character of God - who loves the whole world. Jews used to call Gentiles, 'the uncircumcised' - and used to boast in their superiority - they were 'the circumcised.' They felt that because they obeyed the law of Moses they were somehow superior to Gentiles.
  - Eaton: 'Discrimination always involves pride, a blindness concerning the other person's viewpoint, and a wrong sense of values (as though externals were what counted), and a ethnocentrism (the belief that our way of seeing things, and doing things is inherently superior to your way).'
  - Sadly, religious people often discriminate the worst, especially when they feel that God is on their side. God's solution is to invite everyone onto his side. It is only as people submit to Christ as head that they can begin to experience real reconciliation.

12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

- **The Gentiles were at a real disadvantage when compared with the Jews.**

- Relative to the Jews, the Gentiles were:
- ‘separate from Messiah’ - The Jews had Scriptures that caused them to anticipate the coming of the Messiah. The Gentiles were oblivious of this imminent hope.
- ‘excluded from citizenship in Israel’ - The Jews shared a real sense of being God’s chosen people and they enjoyed a sense of God’s historical provision. They also had laws which kept them from self-genocide (many people groups had come and gone since the formation of Israel because of their lack of order.)
- ‘foreigners to the covenants of promise’ - The Jews had received three covenants of promise from God, that shaped their anticipation for the future:
  - God promised Abraham that he would bring a Saviour from his line.
  - God promised David that he would bring the Saviour-king from his line.
  - God promised through Jeremiah and Ezekiel that there would come a new covenant that would supercede the Mosaic covenant of law.
- ‘without hope’ - God had promised the Jews so much that pertained to their future, but the Gentiles just toughed life out on their own.
- ‘without God’ - They had no revelation of the real God, the God who so powerfully had revealed himself in the history and Scriptures of the Jews.
- ‘in the world’ - They lived amongst people and under kings who were just as lost as them.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- **God’s grace in reaching sinners, especially those who knew little about God, is a staggering miracle.**
  - The word ‘but’ shows the surprising turn of events for Gentiles.
  - The Jews were greatly prepared for the coming of Jesus, but the Gentiles were not prepared at all. The fact that so many responded to the Gospel is a staggering miracle of God’s power and grace!
  - Despite the fact that the Gentiles were in sin, under God’s wrath, and oblivious to the progressive revelations God was giving Israel (about who he is and the coming of the Messiah), God saved them! They were far from God - they were not even moving in the direction of God - and yet he brought them near by exposing them to the Gospel about Jesus’ blood which brings us near - and they believed!
  - When you think of how unlikely it was that people like us could be saved - we can only give glory to God - that somehow he got through to us.

- **The only way to be brought near to God is by the blood of Jesus.**
  - To be brought near to God means that we are reconciled to him, have access to him, can experience his voice and his love! What a privilege.
  - There is nothing we can do to 'be brought near to God'. Not good works. Not religion. Not even trying to obey the teachings of Jesus. No, only Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for sinners makes it possible for us to live in close relationship with a Holy God. He forgives our sins, and cleanses our consciences.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

- **Through the cross, we are one.**
  - God has made a way for very different kinds of people to experience the oneness of spiritual community, and he's done this through the cross.
  - This section speaks of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and how God reconciled them, but it can be applied to how God unites all groups of people who are at enmity with other groups.
  - 'the dividing wall of hostility' - this is a reference to the literal wall that separated the Gentiles from the Jews in the temple in Jerusalem. God was removing the wall that divided them.
  - 'by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations' - this is the interesting part: the real reason Jews and Gentiles could not get on is that the Jews clung to the Mosaic law (with all its customs, food laws, ceremonial laws, civil laws) as a reason for their superiority. God has a surprising way of removing the barrier: he brought the Mosaic law to an end. Galatians explains that it was only a temporary law which was meant to protect the nation of Israel by restraining them from the destructiveness of sin. But now that Christ has come as the fulfilment of the law, we are no longer under the law but under the Spirit.  
(P.S. this does not mean 'Law' in a society is not needed. And this does not mean we are not 'under righteousness' because we are. But our way of living it out is not through legalistic obedience but through Spirit-empowered obedience.)  
Now that the law has been removed, all people can experience the unity of a common dependence on the Spirit in our quest for transformation and obedience.
  - 'His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of

them to God'- God has always planned to re-unite a divided humanity by creating a new humanity, the church, where our reliance on the cross, and on the Spirit, and our submission to Christ become such overwhelming points of commonness that our differences become relatively insignificant.

- '16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God' - at first we get the impression that is just the Gentiles who are far from God (v13) but this verse makes it clear that although Jews were closer to God, they still were far from God and needed to be reconciled to him too! And by the same means that the Gentiles would be reconciled - faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.
- 'through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' - the means by which God removed the hostility between us and him, and us and each other is the cross.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

- **We need to partner with Christ in the preaching of the Gospel.**
  - This is a fascinating verse. It says that Jesus himself came to the Ephesians and preached the Gospel of peace to them. But of course we know that it was human preachers that went there, and human preachers that communicated the message.
  - The point is that Jesus was the one who orchestrated those preachers to speak to those people, and Jesus was so with the preachers that it was as though Jesus himself preached the Gospel to them.
  - We desperately need to rely on Jesus in our efforts to reach people. Allow him to tell us where to go, and what to say - and trust him that as we preach, Christ will also preach through us in power to them.
  - One of the major summarising words for the Gospel is 'peace' as in 'reconciliation with God and, therefore, with each other too'.

18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

- **Shared access to God is the basis of real Christian unity.**
  - What can unite all kinds of Christians is this: our relationship with God has massive similarities: we all have access to the Father through Jesus by one Spirit.
- **Christian prayer and worship is all about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.**
  - The reference to 'access to God' speaks of approaching God in prayer or worship. There are three main dimensions to this prayer:
    - 1) *We pray to / worship the Father.*

- He is a glorious, powerful, loving Father. And we can approach him as a Father. This means that we don't have to sound clever or beautiful in our prayers. We just come as we are, in simplicity, trust and affection.
- 2) *We pray / worship through Christ.*
  - We have to keep reminding ourselves that it is not our recent moral / spiritual performance that qualifies us to approach God, but is the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for our sins and now presented in heaven on our behalf. We have the righteousness and acceptability before God of Christ himself. This gives us confidence to shake off condemnation from past failures and to present vulnerabilities.
- 3) *We pray / worship by one Spirit.*
  - We can really experience the presence of God because of the Spirit. This means that we do not depend on externals such as place of prayer, technique, posture, volume of our prayer as much as we depend on the Spirit. Importantly, the Spirit does not just energise our access to God, but also God's access to us, Through the Spirit we can sense God's communication with us.

### THE CHURCH: A NATION, A FAMILY, A BUILDING (2:19-22)

- The Gentiles had been aliens, but then God included them in a reconstructed, law-free Israel - the church. He then gives three main pictures of this glorious church that they are privileged to be part of.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

- **The church is like a nation / city of citizens.**
  - At Pentecost we saw the remnant of Israel being re-formed by the outpouring of the Spirit. They became the real Israel in the eyes of God. They were God's people, and they were Jews. But then God started to add Gentiles too - and he is insistent that they too are fellow-citizens of this new Israel. To be saved means to be given citizenship in his church, the nation of people under God.
  - A nation in those days was effectively a 'city-state', so the church is also likened to a city of citizens here.
- **The church is a family.**
  - The word 'household' means close family, people who lived together and were genetically linked.
  - God is the Father, Jesus is the elder brother, and all Christians are brothers and sisters! We can choose our friends, but God chooses our spiritual family.

- We're not only fellow-citizens of a city, but family members of a home! We have family-unity, family-likeness, family-secrets and family-traditions.

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- **The church is like a building.**
  - Each new metaphor of the church here shows even more closeness to each other. In a nation, people are fellow-citizens; in a family, they're much closer; but in a building each stone is wedged into the other stones in the tightest bond.
  - This picture of the church as building is worked out in FIVE WAYS in these 2 verses...
- **1) The foundation of the church is the New Testament.**
  - The New Testament documents (which are the enduring product of the first-generation apostles and prophets) are the foundation of the church for all generations to come!
  - Paul does not specifically say this but this is the implication of what he says. Let me explain.  
The early church pioneer leaders consisted primarily of the apostles and their prophetic colleagues. Although, as we shall see in Eph 4:11, there still are apostles and prophets till the end of the age, the first-generation apostles and prophets had specific functions:
    - 1) They were eye-witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.
    - 2) They set the doctrine, pattern, practices, priorities and pattern of the earliest church.
    - 3) They wrote the New Testament documents (which capture both the above two functions).
Every other apostle and prophet cannot contradict them, but need to be faithful to their foundation. That's why Jesus instructed the earliest apostles to teach them (i.e. second generation) everything Christ had commanded them (i.e. first-generation). He also prayed that others (i.e. second generation) will believe in Christ through their (i.e. first-generation) word.
  - The question then is how do we know what the foundation of the apostles and the prophets is? The answer is this: they wrote down, or delegated the writing down of, their teachings - in the documents which now make up the New Testament.
- **2) Christ is the primary stone upon which the whole building is built.**

- Christ is the chief cornerstone. This was the most important stone in the building - it was a stone in the foundation to which every other stone was then added.
- This is why we cannot truly join the church without first being joined to Christ. That is what 'in Christ' means.
- **3) Every Christian is a unique stone in the building.**
  - We are 'living stones'. In ancient buildings every stone was different. God is uniting us in our diversity.
  - Although we are connected to the whole church, we are closest to some Christians, those stones to whom God has sovereignly connected us.
- **4) The church is characterised by unity, growth and holiness.**
  - 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.
  - Unity - we are joined together, like a stone is joined to other stones.
  - Numerical Growth - the building is busy being built, it is rising. More and more stones are being added.
  - Holy - We are set apart for the presence and purposes of God.
- **5) The church is inhabited by the presence of the Spirit**
  - 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.
  - Much like Christ indwelt the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, so he indwells and infills the church - and every Christian - by his Spirit.