

Ephesians 2

A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss

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The Power of God in Salvation: The Dead are Made Alive

Ephesians 2:1-3

Limits of the Text – There’s a contrast between what the Ephesian believers were (dead in trespasses and sin) and what they are (alive in Christ), between what they did (walk according to the course of this world) and what they do (walk in good works). Paul began with a description of their condition before Christ, the condition of every person in the world.

Translation

1 And you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which at one time you walked in conformity with the age of this world, in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air, *the ruler* of the spirit currently working in the sons of disobedience; 3 among whom at one time **we** all also lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the others.

Interpretation

The (very long) introduction to Paul’s letter concluded with his prayer, so chapter 2 is the start of the body of the letter. As is typical with Paul, his body spells out in more detail what is hinted at in the introduction. So if the eulogy of chapter 1 explains how God planned salvation from eternity past, then the doctrine section of chapter 2 begins with an explanation of how God carries out this salvation in people’s lives. The power that raised Christ is the power that raises believers.

This section describes is the condition of everyone in the world, including the Ephesian believers before salvation. “The apostle chooses not to explain the grace of God until he makes inescapably clear the desperate need of human beings.”¹

1 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν,

1 And you were dead in your transgressions and sins,

Verses 1-3 are single, though incomplete sentence in Greek; it is an anacoluthon, a broken sentence, as it has neither subject nor verb.² The “you” is the object. It is

¹ Hoehner, 307.

literally "...you, being dead...." without a subject or verb, without a resolution to the problem. The NET Bible leaves it as an unfinished sentence. Most English translations add an implied subject and verb from verse 4, thus fixing the problem by converting the dangling participle to the verb "were," which captures Paul's intent without following his "bad" grammar.

Paul said the Ephesians were dead (νεκρούς), "so morally or spiritually deficient as to be in effect dead."³ "As those who are spiritually dead cannot communicate with the living, so also those who are spiritually dead cannot communicate with the eternal living God and thus are separated from God."⁴ This is the same word Jesus used to describe the prodigal son in Lk 15:24.

The Ephesians were dead in the area of their transgressions and sins.⁵ Transgressions (παρὰπτώμασιν) have the "imagery of one making a false step so as to lose footing;" they are "a violation of moral standards, offense, wrongdoing, sin."⁶ The same word is used in 1:7 and Co 2:13. Sin (ἁμαρτία) is "missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is God."⁷ It is "to act contrary to the will and law of God."⁸ Both Hoehner and Zodhiates agree that transgressions and sins are synonymous.

Paul began with a summary of the spiritual condition of the Ephesians (and indeed of all people): They were dead. They were separated from God and unable to communicate with him; as dead people, they had no capacity to raise themselves to life. They existed in the realm of continually violating God's moral standards and acting contrary to his will. This was their life, which Paul described it in more detail in the following verses.

2 ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας·

² There is an alternate view which says the subject is God (vs 4), the verbs are made alive, raised, and seated (vss 4-5), and the "you" in vs 1 is the object. In brief, "God, being rich in mercy, made alive, raised, and seated you, being dead in transgressions and sins." Convuluted, to say the least.

³ Arndt, 667.

⁴ Hoehner, 308.

⁵ Dative of sphere.

⁶ Arndt, 770.

⁷ Zodhiates, G266.

⁸ Louw, 1:772.

2 in which at one time you walked in conformity with the age of this world, in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air, *the ruler* of the spirit currently working in the sons of disobedience;

Paul said the Ephesians walked (περιεπατήσατε). Although it can be used literally to mean to walk about or walk around, this verb is used here metaphorically to refer to conduct or behavior. In this verse it has a negative connotation (see also Co 3:7), though it can have a positive connotation, which it does in the ethics section of the letter (see 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15).

Paul described the behavior (conduct) of his readers when they were spiritually dead five ways.⁹ One, they walked in their transgressions and sin. Their daily activities, their ongoing ethics are violating God's moral standards and acting contrary to his will. "In which" (ἐν αἵς) refers back to "sins" and pulls two thoughts together. At one time the Ephesians walked in sins and in conformity with the age and the ruler.

Two, they walked in conformity with the age of this world (κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). I much prefer to translate this as "age of this world," as opposed to "course of this world." Look back to 1:21 and ahead to 2:7. There is a current age, and there is an age yet to come. "Age of this world" refers to the current period of time (era),¹⁰ which is dominated by Satan's world system and is opposed to God.¹¹ In short, the Ephesians lived in accordance with¹² the way Satan is running things. Hoehner sums it up nicely: "The unregenerate are found 'conforming to the standards of the present world order.' They go along with what is fashionable and acceptable and are not out of step with the rest of the world, hence, they embrace temporal values."¹³ As does Vaughn: "To walk according to this fashion is to conform to the world's shifting standards of right and wrong, to be swept up in its pleasures and its practices."¹⁴ Those who walk in conformity with the age of this world believe and do whatever is considered acceptable by their culture at the time. They embrace the current standards of right and wrong. They practice what is commonly practiced and find pleasure in what is commonly pleasurable. Morality is determined by the consensus.

Three, they walked in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air (κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ αἄρου). Ruler (prince) is the same word used in 1:21. In

⁹ Alternatively, you could list these as three influences: world, devil, flesh.

¹⁰ Descriptive genitive.

¹¹ See Gal 1:4 where it is described as the present evil age.

¹² Accusative of standard.

¹³ Hoehner, 310.

¹⁴ Vaughn, 41.

general, it is one who has precedence or authority. In this context, it means a chief or prince among the angels,¹⁵ obviously a demonic angel; it is most likely Satan himself. Domain (power) is the same word used in 1:21, but with a different meaning. There it was one who has the authority to rule, but here it's the sphere in which one has the authority to rule. In Lk 23:7, this could be translated as Herod's jurisdiction. In Lk 4:6, this word was used when the devil claimed all the kingdoms of the world as his domain. This verse asserts that Satan rules the atmosphere, the air the Ephesians breathed, the environment they lived in; the domain of the air is "the place or sphere of the activity of the devil."¹⁶ He sets the standards for the age of this world. And the Ephesians lived in accordance with¹⁷ his rulership of this environment. Another good summary by Hoehner: "The unregenerate not only walk according to the values of the present age but also under the control of the leader who rules over this evil world."¹⁸ Those who walk in conformity with the rule of the domain of the air live in Satan's jurisdiction, the world system opposed to God's kingdom, and thus they live under his control. He directs the world, and thus he directs them.

Four, they walked in conformity with the ruler of the spirit working in the sons of disobedience. There is some debate on the way that "spirit" refers to the rest of the verse. τοῦ πνεύματος is genitive, and thus is literally translated "of the spirit." It refers back to the head noun, "ruler." Even though many translations (e.g., HCSB, ESV, NKJV, ISV, NIV) make it appositional to ruler (i.e., the ruler, which is the spirit), I don't understand why they do so, because that doesn't make grammatical sense.¹⁹ I think this is simply an ellipsis of the word ruler: the ruler of the domain of the air, *the ruler* of the spirit. The NET Bible is the only translation that is careful to make this explicit. The one who rules the environment is also the one who rules the spirit of the disobedient.

What is the spirit of the disobedient? If there is a ruler over this spirit, then spirit itself is not personal; that is, the spirit is not another reference to Satan. Instead it refers to "a part of the human personality...the source and seat of insight, feeling, and will."²⁰ See Ro 1:9, 1 Co 2:11, and Mt 26:41. God's power is working in believers (3:20), but there is a spirit working (ἐνεργουῦντος) in the disobedient. Working means "to put one's capabilities into operation"²¹ and to "produce an effect."²²

¹⁵ Zodhiates.

¹⁶ Hoehner, 312.

¹⁷ Accusative of standard.

¹⁸ Hoehner, 312.

¹⁹ See Wallace page 103 for more details on the grammar here.

²⁰ Arndt, 833.

²¹ Arndt, 335.

²² Zodhiates, 1754.

Who are the disobedient? This spirit is working in the sons of disobedience (ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας); those who do not believe the gospel are those who are disobedient (5:6; Co 3:6). The NET Bible notes that “sons of disobedience” is a Hebrew idiom for “people characterized by disobedience.”

Satan is the ruler over the spirit (the personality) of non-believers, and this spirit (personality) produces effects in the lives of these non-believers that is in accordance with Satan’s rulership. His influence causes these spirits to produce a Satan-directed effect in their lives. In short, they do what he wants them to do. Satan influences people indirectly (through their environment, the world system he rules over) and directly (through their spirit, the insights, feelings, and wills of the people in his system).

3 ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιῶντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί·

3 among whom at one time we all also lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the others.

Five, they live in the lusts of their flesh. The “whom” in “among whom” (ἐν οἷς²³) refers back to “sons.” They lived among the sons of disobedience and lived in the lusts of their flesh. Who is the emphatic “we?” The contrast between “you” and “we” is most likely between the readers and the writer (with his companions), carrying on the idea from 1:12-13. Some see it as Gentiles versus Jews, but this causes inconsistencies. Did only Gentiles walk in conformity with the age of this world? Did God only love the Jews? Were only Gentiles saved by faith? Obviously not. When Paul wanted to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles, he did so clearly (2:11). When Paul said “we all” (ἡμεῖς πάντες) he was saying that he and his companions used to live in the lusts of their flesh as well.

“We lived” (ἀνεστράφημέν) literally has the idea of turning back and forth; it is used here figuratively meaning to live within a certain boundary of behavior. Like walking in 2:2, it’s figurative language for conduct or behavior. The actions of the Ephesians were constrained by the boundary of the lusts of their flesh; they continually satisfied themselves.

²³ It’s plural.

What are the lusts of the flesh? A lust (ἐπιθυμία) is “a desire for something forbidden or simply inordinate, craving.”²⁴ The flesh (τῆς σαρκός) is not simply a reference to one’s body. “In Paul’s thought [especially] all parts of the body constitute a totality known as σάρξ or *flesh*, which is dominated by sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the σάρξ.”²⁵ The flesh is “that self-regarding element in human nature which has been corrupted at the source, characterized by appetites and propensities which, if unchecked, produce ‘the works of the flesh’.”²⁶ In short, the flesh is our “unregenerate nature.”²⁷ “One who lives in the flesh is depicted as one whose existence is apart from God and thus opposed to God and his ways.”²⁸ The lusts of the flesh are the desires of the sin nature. Those who live in the lusts of their flesh do whatever their flesh (their sin nature) wants to do. Though they might profess to be free to do whatever they want, they in fact are slaves to satisfying the passions of their body and mind. The sin nature and the mind crave to do what is sinful, and Paul said they lived within the boundaries of these cravings. This is how unbelievers normally live; “they are at the mercy of their passions.”²⁹

What does it mean to be a child of wrath? Children of wrath (τέκνα...ὀργῆς) are the recipients of God’s indignation, retribution, and punitive judgment, which flow out of his holiness. They were born (by birth, by nature) as recipients of this wrath, an inheritance from Adam (Ro 5:15-18). The NET Bible notes that children of wrath, much like sons of disobedience, is a Hebrew idiom meaning people characterized by (or destined for) wrath. Those who are dead in their transgressions and sin are children of wrath. They are receiving and will receive God’s indignation, retribution, and punitive judgment. There are temporal and eternal consequences to being characterized by the wrath of God.

To summarize 1-3: Everyone is dead spiritually, continually engaging in sin. They do whatever their environment encourages them to do, whatever the devil influences them to do, and whatever their flesh wants to do. The result is God’s wrath. This is a hopeless situation!

²⁴ Arndt, 372. It’s dative of sphere.

²⁵ Arndt, 915.

²⁶ Bruce, 283-284.

²⁷ Vaughan, 43.

²⁸ Hoehner, 320.

²⁹ Vaughan, 43.

Abridged Structural Diagram

(all of ch 1)

And

you were dead

in transgressions

and

sins

in which

at one time

you walked

in cfm. w/ the age

of this world,

in cfm. w/ the ruler

of the domain of the air,

the ruler

of the spirit currently working

in the sons of dis.

among whom

we lived

and

we were children

Tracing the Argument

External – The prayer of 1:15-23 concluded with a demonstration of God’s power, which raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God’s right hand, put all thing in subjection under his feet, and gave him to the church. This is the same power which takes people who are dead in their trespasses and sins and makes them alive in Christ, raises them, and seats them with Christ.

Internal – The condition of man is spiritual death. He continually sins, he lives in conformity with the world’s standards (which are influenced by the devil), he is directly influenced by the devil, and he obeys the desires of his flesh and his man. For all this, he is receiving and will receive God’s wrath. From this situation there is no escape.

Textual Outline

1. The Ephesians walked in sins and transgressions (1).
2. The Ephesians walked in conformity with the age of this world (2).
3. The Ephesians walked in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air (2).
4. The Ephesians walked in conformity with the ruler of the spirit currently working in the sons of disobedience (2).
5. The Ephesians lived in the lust of their flesh (3).
6. The Ephesians were children of wrath (3).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Eph 2:1-3 in order to describe the condition of those who are spiritually dead.

Teaching Outline

When God's people understand who they were before they were saved, they understand the power of God in salvation. So today I want you to grasp what it means to be spiritually dead. From the first three verses of Eph 2, we are going to see six aspects of those who are spiritually dead, our condition before salvation.

1. Understand that before God saved us, we were dead in our sins (1).
2. Understand that before God saved us, we walked according to the age of this world (2).
3. Understand that before God saved us, we walked according to the rule of the domain of the air (2).
4. Understand that before God saved us, we walked according to the ruler of the spirit working in the sons of disobedience (2).
5. Understand that before God saved us, we lived in the lusts of our flesh (3).
6. Understand that before God saved us, we were children of wrath (3).

Ephesians 2:4-6

Limits of the Text – There's a contrast between what the Ephesian believers were (dead in trespasses and sin) and what they are (alive in Christ), between what they did (walk according to the course of this world) and what they do (walk in good works). Having described the condition of the Ephesians before Christ, Paul then told what God did for them.

Translation

4 But God, being abundant in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ— you have been saved by grace—6 raised us together *with him*, and seated *us* together *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Interpretation

Now that Paul has reminded his readers of the completely helpless situation they were in, he reminded them of God's solution—grace! The more one understands his sin, the more he is amazed by God's grace.

4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὦν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς,

4 But God, being abundant in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us,

The verse begins with a “but” (δὲ), a contrast that goes back to verse 1: “You, being dead in trespasses” is contrasted with “God, being abundant in mercy.”

The Ephesians' situation was so bad that only God could solve it; he is the focus of the solution. Having mentioned the name of God, Paul immediately stopped and began to describe his character, which is the reason he solved man's sin problem. God is abundant in mercy (ἐλέει). To be merciful is “to show kindness or concern for someone in serious need.”³⁰ God showed kindness to those trapped in sin and destined for his wrath. In 1:7 God is abundant in grace; here he's abundant in mercy. God has a vast supply of showing kindness to those who are in serious need, sinners who are trapped in their sinful lifestyles, people who cannot break free from the influences of the world, the devil, and their flesh.

³⁰ Louw, 1:749.

Why did God demonstrate his mercy? He demonstrated mercy because he has great love (διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ).³¹ Love is “God’s willful direction toward man. It involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires.”³² Love is not necessarily merited (Ro 5:8). God had love, thus he put his love into practice, and the result is his mercy. In other words, God’s mercy flows out of his love.

5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, – χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι –

5 even when we were dead in *our* transgressions, made *us* alive together with Christ— you have been saved by grace—

The verse begins with a καὶ, but here it is translated as “even.” Hoehner identifies this as ascensive,³³ qualifying the participle and intensifying the greatness of God’s mercy.³⁴ It connects God’s love to the clause “when we were dead in transgressions” (ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν). God’s love is so great that he loved Paul and the Ephesians even when they were dead in their transgressions. This clause summarizes 2:1-3, thus emphasizing God’s mercy.

Given God’s character of mercy, what did he do about their condition? He did three things. The first thing God did about their condition was to make them alive together with Christ; this is the power to communicate with and relate to God.³⁵ “Made alive together” (συνεζωοποίησεν) is the first of three rare verbs³⁶ that start with the preposition συν (together, with). This verb is from two words, “to make alive” and “together;” it is used only here and Co 2:13.³⁷ The verb “to make alive” is used by itself both literally (1 Co 15:22) and figuratively/spiritually (Ga 3:21). Paul used it here with a spiritual meaning, having the sense of regeneration. In verse 1, the Ephesians were spiritually dead in their transgressions, but God made them spiritually alive.

This verse and the next one are clearly tied to 1:20; the similarity is too strong to be an accident. When God in his power raised his Son from the dead, he also made those

³¹ Accusative of cause.

³² Zodhiates, G26.

³³ Ascensive: “a word or phrase that intensifies or makes more obvious the action or idea being expressed” (from www.biblecentre.net/nt/greek/alex/glo.htm).

³⁴ Hoehner, 329.

³⁵ Recall that this entire section is about God’s power in the life of believers.

³⁶ In fact, this word appears to be unique to Paul (Kittel, TDNT, 7:787).

³⁷ In Co 2:13 “made alive” is closely tied to the forgiveness of our sins; this makes sense, as our spiritual death is in our transgressions and sins (2:1).

who were spiritually dead spiritually alive. Previously Paul and his readers were separated from God, unable to communicate with him, under the unstoppable influence of the world, the devil, and the flesh, and a recipient of God's wrath. But being made alive with Christ changed all of these. They had a relationship with God, they could communicate with him in prayer, they no longer had to walk in conformity to the world or Satan, they didn't have to be controlled by the lusts of their flesh, and they would not experience God's wrath. Wow, what an amazing turnabout!

At this point, Paul burst out with another statement about God's character: You have been saved by grace. Not only is God abundant in mercy and has great love, he is also gracious. The prepositional phrase "by grace"³⁸ (χάριτι) answers the question "how?" How were the Ephesians saved? They were saved by grace. Since they were dead in their sins, they had no claims on God's mercy; they didn't deserve to be made alive together with Christ. The only reason it happened was God's grace.

Paul wrote, "You have been saved" (ἐστε σεσωσμένοι). To save is to rescue or preserve from something or to make safe from a danger; in this case the danger is eternal death. The verb is a periphrastic construction. According to Wallace, present tense + perfect tense = perfect tense, so the translation should be "you have been saved." Salvation occurred in the past, but it continues into the present and has current ramifications; it's a past event with a present state.³⁹ When Paul used the word saved he was summarizing made alive, raised, and seated, which are due to God's being gracious.

Why does "you have been saved by grace" appear here as well as in verse 8? Hoehner identifies verse 5 as a parenthetical outburst that assures the reader that salvation is based upon God's grace,⁴⁰ and he expounded upon the idea in verse 8. Since Paul waited to develop these ideas of grace and salvation until verse 8, I will do the same.

6 καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

6 raised *us* together *with him*, and seated *us* together *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

³⁸ Adverbial genitive of means.

³⁹ Vaughn, 48.

⁴⁰ Hoehner, 331.

The second thing God did about their condition was to raise them together with Christ;⁴¹ this is power over sin. Raised together (συνήγειρεν) is another compound verb; it is from “to raise” and “together.” When Christ was raised, they were raised (in a spiritual, not literal, sense). It is used only here, in 3:1 (where it leads to ethical implications), and in Co 2:12 (where it is closely associated with water baptism, which pictures this event). This concept is explained more fully in Ro 6:4: “...as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (NASB95). The Ephesians used to walk in the old life, the life of transgressions and sins, but now they walked in newness of life. In Co 3:1, this newness of life is described as continually seeking the things above, which leads (in 3:5) to considering the members of the body dead to various sins. When they were raised with Christ (a past event, not future), they were given the ability (the power) to not sin and to live in holiness.

What is the difference between “with him” (in the first half of the verse) and “in Christ” (in the second half)? “With Christ” comes from the verbs, and it states the connection between the resurrection and exaltation of Christ and their spiritual resurrection and exaltation. “In Christ” looks back to 1:1, where it refers to being in union with Christ. All of this occurs only because when they were saved, they had a personal relationship with Jesus.

The third thing God did about their condition was to seat them together with Christ in the heavenly places; this is power over the devil and demonic influences. Seated together (συνεκάθισεν) is the third compound verb; it is from “to sit” and “together.” When this verb is transitive (which it is here), it has causal force, thus it has the idea that God caused them to sit (i.e., God seated them).

God seated the Ephesians in the heavenly places (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις). When Christ was seated in the heavenly places (1:20), the Ephesians were also seated (in a spiritual sense) with him. This verb is used only here and in Lk 22:55; the noun heavenly places is also used in 1:3, 1:20, 3:10, and 6:12. Note that the Ephesians were not seated at the Father’s right hand, as Christ was (1:20). Jesus alone has this unique relationship with the Father.

Why did God seat the Ephesians with Christ in the heavenly places? He seated them to give them authority, anticipating the spiritual warfare of 6:1ff. In 1:20 God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand. Similarly in 2:1 and 2:5, Paul’s readers

⁴¹ The “us” and the “with him” in this verse are implied from verse 5. Note again the parallel between these two verbs and those in 1:20.

were dead and God made them alive, raised them, and seated them. The exaltation of Christ put him in a position of power and authority over every ruler and authority. Every believer is seated with Christ, thus giving them the same authority. Believers are no longer forced to walk in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air, the ruler of the spirit working the sons of disobedience. When the Ephesians were seated with Christ, they were freed from Satan's rulership.

Abridged Structural Diagram

```
(you, dead in sins [1-3])
|
But
| being abundant in mercy
| | because of his great love with which he loved us
| | even when we were dead in our transgressions
| |
God made us alive together with Christ
|
|         -you have been saved by grace-
|
raised us together with him
and
seated us together with him
in the heavenly places
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Tracing the Argument

External – The prayer of 1:15-23 concluded with a demonstration of God’s power, which raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God’s right hand, put all thing in subjection under his feet, and gave him to the church. This is the same power which takes people who are dead in their trespasses and sins and makes them alive in Christ, raises them, and seats them with Christ.

Internal – The condition of man is inescapable, spiritual death. But God, because of his mercy and love, made the Ephesians alive, raised them, and seated them together with Christ.

Textual Outline

1. God made the Ephesians alive together with Christ (4-5).
2. God raised the Ephesians together with Christ (6).
3. God seated the Ephesians together with Christ (6).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Eph 2:4-6 in order to describe God’s power in salvation

Teaching Outline

When God’s people understand what God did for them together with Christ in salvation, they understand the power of God in salvation. Today I want us to

comprehend what God did for us when he saved us. From these 3 verses in Ephesians 4, we are going to see 3 things that God did for us in salvation.

1. Understand that when God saved us, he made us alive together with Christ (4-5).
 - a. This is the power to relate to God.
2. Understand that when God saved us, he raised us together with Christ (6).
 - a. This is power over sin.
3. Understand that when God saved us, he seated us together with Christ (6).
 - a. This is power over the devil.

Ephesians 2:7-10

Limits of the Text – There's a contrast between what the Ephesian believers were (dead in trespasses and sin) and what they are (alive in Christ), between what they did (walk according to the course of this world) and what they do (walk in good works). Having described the condition of the Ephesians before Christ and what God did for them with Christ, Paul finished this section by explaining God's motivation for saving them.

Translation

7 so that in the coming ages he might demonstrate the incomparable abundance of his grace in generosity toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For you have been saved by grace through faith; and this *was* not from you, *but it was* a gift of God. 9 *It was* not from works, so no one may boast. 10 For we are **his** masterpiece, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we might walk in them.

Interpretation

7 ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

7 so that in the coming ages he might demonstrate the incomparable abundance of his grace in generosity toward us in Christ Jesus.

Why did God make alive, raise, and seat the Ephesians? This verse begins with “so that” (ἵνα), letting the readers know God's motivation for making alive, raising, and seating. His motivation is bigger than their individual salvation, bigger than a holy bride, and bigger than changed communities or countries. God has something he wants to demonstrate; his motivation is nothing less than to demonstrate the incomparable riches of his grace for all eternity. This is the same idea mentioned in 1:6, 1:12, and 1:14, where spiritual blessings are given “to the praise of his glory.”

God wants to demonstrate the abundance of his grace. To demonstrate (ἐνδείξηται) is to make known, point out, display, or manifest something. The something that God wants to make known is the incomparable abundance of his grace. Grace (χάριτος), the subject of Paul's outburst in verse 5, is “a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor... God's grace affects man's sinfulness and not only forgives the repentant sinner, but brings joy

and thankfulness to him.”⁴² God has an incomparable (ὑπερβάλλον) abundance of grace. Just as it was used back in 1:19,⁴³ this comparative word means to surpass, to excel, to exceed, or to go beyond. God’s grace is far beyond any other type of grace from any other person.

How did God make the incomparable abundance of his grace known? God demonstrated his grace in the area of his generosity (or kindness) (ἐν χρηστότητι).⁴⁴ Hoehner thinks this refers to the whole of salvation.⁴⁵ Saving the Ephesians was generous and kind (in verse 8 it will be called a gift), and it is in this generosity of salvation that they could perceive God’s grace. Note this is the fourth characteristic of God seen in this text: Mercy, love, grace, and generosity.

God’s grace will be demonstrated in the come ages. When will that be? The coming ages (ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις) are the times after the age of this world (2:2; see also 1:21). God’s grace will be on display for all eternity, and no doubt we will praise him much for it.⁴⁶

There is a huge contrast here: While the Ephesians were children of wrath (2:3), receivers of God’s judgment, he was generous to them.⁴⁷

8 Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον·

8 For you have been saved by grace through faith; and this *was* not from you, *but it was* a gift of God.

In 2:7 Paul answered the “why?” of salvation; in this verse he answered the “how?” This verse begins with “for” (γὰρ), by which Paul asked “how?” How is it that we have been made alive, raised, and seated with Christ? How is such an amazing salvation—a rescue from eternal death that gives the power to communicate with and relate to God, the power over sin, and the power over the devil and demonic influences—possible?

⁴² Zodhiates, G5485.

⁴³ See also 3:19.

⁴⁴ Dative of sphere.

⁴⁵ Hoehner, 339.

⁴⁶ Some, including O’Brien (173) and Hoehner (337), believe the plural indicates the period of time right after Paul’s time and all future times up to and including eternity, though Hoehner acknowledges it won’t be demonstrated fully until eternity. My question: Why does this start after Paul’s age? Would God not be praised in the age Paul lives in?

⁴⁷ O’Brien, 172.

How could this be? Paul's answer is simple: It is God's grace. It is God freely choosing to favor the Ephesians out of his own bounty and benevolence.

Salvation is made possible by God's grace,⁴⁸ but it must be received and accepted. Grace saves only when it comes through faith (διὰ πίστεως).⁴⁹ Faith is the "state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted, trust, confidence, faith."⁵⁰ Vaughn calls it the hand that receives the gift.⁵¹ Foulkes describes it as "a turning to God with a sense of need and weakness and emptiness and a willingness to receive what he offers, to receive the Lord himself."⁵² This means to recognize that a person cannot save himself but is totally dependent upon God. It means that he turns from himself to God and trust him completely, having confidence that he can save. It means to accept Jesus. It is the non-meritorious response of receiving what has already been done in Christ.⁵³ "As one who trusts in a chair for support because it is trustworthy, so one trusts in God's gracious salvation because God is reliable or trustworthy. In short, one does not work to support oneself in the chair, nor does one work to obtain salvation."⁵⁴

"The [salvation] experience has been likened to that of a man in a shipwreck. For the moment he is taken out of the icy water into the lifeboat, he is a saved man. He may scarcely feel his safety or be relieved from his fears; indeed, there may pass many long hours before his feet touch the dry land and his rescue is complete. Nonetheless, from the moment he is in the boat he is safe."⁵⁵

Paul wanted to make crystal clear two implications of salvation by grace through faith. The first implication is that the source of salvation is God, not the Ephesians. It is not possible under any circumstance for man to generate, create, or originate salvation. It cannot be obtained by anything inherent within a man.⁵⁶ It is even beyond his ability to think of a God-acceptable way to save himself. This is because everyone is by nature dead in transgressions and sins (2:1). Salvation must come from outside of man, and indeed it comes as a gift from God.

⁴⁸ See the notes on grace and salvation in 2:5 and 2:7.

⁴⁹ Genitive of means.

⁵⁰ Arndt, 818.

⁵¹ Vaughn, 49.

⁵² Foulkes, 83.

⁵³ O'Brien, 174.

⁵⁴ Hoehner, 342.

⁵⁵ Vaughn, 48.

⁵⁶ Hoehner, 345.

What does “this” (τοῦτο) in “this was not from you” point back to? What specifically was not from the Ephesians? The pronoun doesn’t agree with grace or faith or the participle saved. It’s best to conclude that this neuter pronoun refers back to the preceding section, namely 2:4-8a, thus referring to salvation by grace. “This” is used in a similar fashion in 1:15 to refer back to the eulogy. Paul wrote that the Ephesians’ salvation was not was “from you” (ἐξ ὑμῶν). This is genitive of source, referring to the origin of salvation. In short he said, “You are not the source of your salvation.”

9 οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσθαι.

9 It was not from works, so no one may boast.

The second implication is that the means of salvation is provided freely by God; it cannot be earned through works. Considering the Gentile audience, the word “works” (ἔργων) is not exclusively referring to obeying the Mosaic Law. It refers to “human effort in general...any effort to win God’s approval,”⁵⁷ whether through the law or not. The Jews believed they could be justified by obedience to the law (contra Ga 2:16), and every generation of man believes they can be good enough to go to heaven (or at least not bad enough to go to hell).

Paul rejected such thinking here. Why did he reject it? First, the condition described in 2:1-3 makes this impossible. Second, because if man could earn his own salvation, then he might boast (καυχῆσθαι); he might take pride in and brag about himself. Man would receive the glory that only God is worthy of.

10 αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

10 For we are his masterpiece, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we might walk in them.

Salvation is based on God’s grace. In verse 10, Paul gave the reason why it can’t come from within a man, nor can he earn it. The reason is that only God can re-create a person. It is the masterful working of his hands that takes a dead man and re-makes him as an alive man.

The words “masterpiece” (ποίημα) and “having been created” (κτισθέντες) are not cognates, but they are synonyms. The first means something made or created (by a

⁵⁷ O’Brien, 177.

craftsman), and the second means to create or produce.⁵⁸ The words have both the idea of God's personal involvement—as if he had hands and used them to make us—and his creative activity (physically and spiritually), thus I translated one as masterpiece and the other as created. It's similar in idea to “new creation” in 2 Co 5:17.

God has a specific goal for his master: Good works. When God re-creates a man, he changes him from walking in transgressions and sins (2:1-2) to walking in good works. That's a change that glorifies God. Walking is the same verb as in verse 2, referring to conduct; the specific conduct, the specific good works, that we should walk in are detailed more in chapter's 4-6.

God prepared these good works beforehand (προητοίμασεν). He made these works ready before time begin, which is much like the idea of predestination. This verb is used only here and Ro 9:23.

⁵⁸ It was used in Homer of founding a city.

Abridged Structural Diagram

(in Christ Jesus [vs 6])

so that

in the coming ages

he might demonstrate the incomparable abundance of his grace

in generosity

toward us

in Christ Jesus.

For (why will he demonstrate his grace?)

you have been saved by grace through faith;

and

this was not from you,

but

it was a gift of God.

It was not from works,

so

no one may boast.

For (why can't it be from me or works?)

we are his masterpiece,

having been created

in Christ Jesus

for good works

which

God prepared beforehand

so that

we might walk in them.

Tracing the Argument

External – The prayer of 1:15-23 concluded with a demonstration of God's power, which raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God's right hand, put all thing in subjection under his feet, and gave him to the church. This is the same power which takes people who are dead in their trespasses and sins and makes them alive in Christ, raises them, and seats them with Christ.

Internal – When God saved the Ephesians—when he made them alive, raised them, and seated them together with Christ—he did so in order to demonstrate his grace. This saving grace comes through faith, but not from within the Ephesians and not from their works. The result is walking in good works.

Textual Outline

1. God saved the Ephesians in order to demonstrate his grace (8-9).
2. God saved the Ephesians to so that they would walk in good works (10).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Eph 2:7-10 in order to describe God's purposes for salvation

Teaching Outline

When God's people understand God's purposes for salvation, they understand the power of God in salvation. This morning I want us to understand why God saved us. From our text we are going to see 2 of God's purposes in salvation.

1. Understand that God saved us in order to demonstrate his grace (8-9).
2. Understand that God saved us so that we would walk in good works (10).

The Power of God in Salvation: Jews and Gentiles are Made into One New Body

Ephesians 2:11-13

Limits of the Text

In 2:1-10, Paul wrote about the power of God in salvation, how it transforms dead sinners into living children. In 2:11-22, Paul continued to write about the power of God in salvation, how it brings together Jews and Gentiles into one unified group. Paul began this section by describing the hopeless status of the Gentiles.

Translation & Interpretation

11 Therefore remember that formerly **you**, the Gentiles in flesh (called “uncircumcised” by those called “circumcised,” *which is done in the flesh by hands*), 12 were apart from Christ, having been excluded from the citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus **you** who were formerly far away were brought near by the blood of Christ.

If 2:1-10 views salvation through the lens of individuals, then 2:11-22 views it through the lens of nations. In Paul’s day there was a huge racial, ethnic divide. The Jews considered themselves quite superior to other races. Instead of sharing God’s love with the nations, they merely despised them. It was against Jewish law to aid a Gentile woman in childbirth. If a Jew married a Gentile, the Jews promptly carried out death rites for the Jew. To enter a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean.⁵⁹ It was a situation far worse than segregation in the south or the immigration problems of Miami and San Diego. If this divide could be broken, it would demonstrate the power of the gospel.

There is a grammatical issue in these verses. In verse 11, Paul began with a conjunction (that), a subject (you), and a sense of time (formerly); in verse 12 he restated the conjunction (that) and the subject (you) and used a slightly different sense of time (at one time, at that time). There is no verb in verse 11, but there is a verb in verse 12. It’s not clear why Paul did this, nor how he intended it to be read. There are two choices:

- These verses are one sentence. If so, then it appears Paul lost his train of thought while in the “uncircumcised” part of verse 11 and so repeated himself in verse 12. To translate into proper English, one drops the dupes.

⁵⁹ Vaughan, 55.

- These verses are two sentences. If so, then a verb of being is simply implied in verse 11. To translate into proper English, one supplies the verb.

I prefer the first option, as they are so obviously identical.

11 Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου,

11 Therefore remember that formerly **you**, the Gentiles in flesh (called “uncircumcised” by those called “circumcised,” *which is done in the flesh by hands*),

Paul began this section with a “therefore” (Διὸ), an inferential conjunction that looked back to 2:1-10. Paul had started with their sinful condition in 2:1-10, and then he added to it the disadvantages of being Gentile. Together these made obvious the huge contrast of being with Christ and without Christ. Why have such a contrast? Paul commanded the Ephesians to remember (μνημονεύετε), which is the only imperative in this section (2:11-22). The command was to remember, but the goal was more than just knowledge recall. Remembering where they had been and seeing more clearly where they were now should have produced an overflow of love and gratefulness in their heart for the Savior. To remember is to “deepen our appreciation of the mercy and grace of God and make us more thankful, more humble.”⁶⁰

Paul wanted the Ephesians to remember five privileges that they did not have, privileges that he began listing in verse 12. But before he listed these privileges, he reminded them why did not have these privileges: they were Gentiles in flesh (τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί). This denoted a class of people;⁶¹ the Ephesians were part of a class of people known as Gentiles in flesh. How did they know they were in this class? They knew because the Jewish people designated them as being uncircumcised. Paul took an extra moment to describe this idea of circumcision a bit more fully, and it seems to be parenthetical in nature since it divides the subject of the sentence (you) from the verb (were), which doesn’t appear until verse 12. The opposite of “in flesh” is “in Christ” (2:13).

Why was it important for Paul to note they were designated as uncircumcised? “Uncircumcised” was a derogatory, ethnic label, one from a distinctively Jewish point of view. Although the Jews were proud of this distinction (because it pointed to their covenant relationship with God), certainly Greeks and Romans would not have called

⁶⁰ Vaughan, 54.

⁶¹ Hoehner, 353.

themselves uncircumcised Gentiles. This designation put Paul's Ephesian readers in a different group than Paul and the Israelites; Paul delineated the resulting implications of this in the next verse.

Why did Paul note that the Jew's circumcision was circumcision done in the flesh by hands? It distinguished the Jews as an ethnic group from those who have been circumcised in their heart by God (Ro 2:28-29; Php 3:2-3; Co 2:11), a spiritual group. Since the Abrahamic covenant (Ge 17:1-14), circumcision had been a sign of the covenant relationship; after the cross, this circumcision had no covenant value.

To summarize, Paul reminded the Ephesians who they were. Not only had they been spiritually dead in transgressions and sins (2:1), but they were Gentiles, not Jews, which implied they had even less privileges. The distinction between Gentile and Jew was an ethnic, physical distinction, though this distinction no longer had any value in God's new salvation-in-Christ economy.

12 ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.

12 were apart from Christ, having been excluded from the citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Paul commanded the Ephesians to remember the privileges that they did not share with the Jews. The word picture is one of an outsider looking in, a foreigner who does not share the benefits with the citizens, benefits that are substantial indeed. As an illustration, it might be like someone who lives in a third world country who has heard of America and how wonderful it is, but they are not able to come to this country and live here for themselves. So what are these privileges? Paul listed five.

The first privilege they lacked was the hope of the Messiah. Paul wrote that that they were apart from Christ (χωρὶς Χριστοῦ). Christ is a title, not a name. The idea is not so much that they were without Jesus, but rather that they were without the hope of the Christ, the Messiah. The Jews had been promised a deliverer and a restorer (Ro 9:5). Knowing that the Messiah would make everything right was an immense source of strength and courage for the Jews.

The second privilege they lacked was Jewish citizenship. They were excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and excluded (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι) has the idea of being alienated,

estranged, or a foreigner. The perfect tense of this verb -indicates that this condition was true in the past and was still true at the time Paul wrote. The Gentiles were excluded from the citizenship of Israel, where citizenship (πολιτείας) is “the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity.”⁶² The emphasis is not placed upon the entity itself however, but upon the rights and privileges associated with belonging to this entity,⁶³ hence my translation of citizenship (as opposed to commonwealth). It was through Israel that “God made himself known to man and entered into relationship with them.”⁶⁴ In particular, the Jews had the Law (Ro 3:1-2), which taught them what God was like, what he had done, what he expected of his people, and how he was to be worshipped. The Jews also had the prophets, God’s messengers of warning when the nation was straying. What a privilege, that God would so interact with his chosen people!

The third privilege they lacked was the promise given in the covenants. Paul’s readers were foreigners to the covenants of the promise. Foreigners (ξένοι) has the idea of being strange or foreign, coming from another country. It’s the word used in the LXX of Ruth in Ru 2:10. I translated it as foreigners (as opposed to strangers) to keep with the imagery of citizenship, thus a foreigner is one from another country who does not possess the rights of citizenship, such as the benefits of the covenants.

What is the promise of the covenants? It’s important to know that it is *the* promise in Greek (τῆς ἐπαγγελίας); there is a specific promise in mind. I think that the promise is the one given to Abraham in Ge 12:3b: “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (ESV). The greatest promise made to Abraham was neither possession of the land nor the vast nation that would come from Isaac (neither of which would make much sense in this context) but the blessing of all the earth, the Messiah, who is Jesus.

Which covenants were the covenants of the promise? It refers to all those covenants that confirmed and/or brought about the promise. The Abrahamic covenant, where Abe’s descendents would possess the land (Ge 15:18-19), the improved Abrahamic covenant, where there would also be many descendents who would come through Isaac (Ge 17:4-6, 21), the covenants to Isaac and Jacob covenant, which simply renewed the Abrahamic covenant (Ge 26:1-5; 28:13-15), and finally the Davidic covenant, where God promised to establish David’s throne forever (2 Sa 7:16).

⁶² Arndt, 845.

⁶³ Hoehner, 356-7.

⁶⁴ Vaughan, 56.

The Gentiles were not the people through which blessing would flow, they did not possess the land through which blessing would flow, nor did they rule the kingdom through which blessing would flow. They were foreigners.

The fourth privilege they lacked was hope. Hope (ἐλπίδα) is “the looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment.”⁶⁵ Logically following their lack of the third privilege, the Gentiles did not have a national hope of God looking out for them, and neither did they have the eternal hope of knowing there is life with God after death (1 Th 4:13). “They had no knowledge of salvation that would include a future resurrection and life eternal. They had no idea of future messianic deliverance and blessings.”⁶⁶

The fifth privilege they lacked was God himself. Paul wrote that they were without God. “Without God” is from ἄθεοι, which is where we get the English word “atheist.” Although the citizens in the Roman Empire typically worshipped the pantheon of Roman gods as well as their own local and family gods, they didn’t know the One True God, thus they were without his power and protection and grace and mercy and peace.

To summarize, the Jewish people were certainly in a place of privilege over the Gentiles, though perhaps they didn’t always take full advantage of these privileges. To understand what they had formerly lacked should have generated much gratitude in the Ephesian readers.

13 νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγύς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

13 But now in Christ Jesus **you** who were formerly far away were brought near by the blood of Christ.

The difference between then and now was being in Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). It is the union with Christ from 1:1, a personal, close association with Jesus. This is the most fundamental reality of a believer.

The Gentiles were brought (ἐγενήθητε) near. Although this verb is often translated “become,” here it has the idea of a change of location. Note the passive voice; the Ephesians did not bring themselves near, God did. This designation of far away and near may be an illusion to Is 57:19: “‘Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the

⁶⁵ Arndt, 319.

⁶⁶ Hoehner, 360.

Lord, 'and I will heal him'" (ESV).⁶⁷ In Peter's Pentecostal message, he said that the promise of forgiveness was for his immediate Jewish audience and for those who were far off (Ac 2:39), a typical designation for Gentiles (1Ki 8:41; Is 5:26).

This change in position, this moving from the outside to the inside, from having nothing to having everything, was accomplished by the blood of Christ (ἐν τῷ αἵματι).⁶⁸ Refer back to 1:7 for more on the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ brought the Gentiles near to what (or whom)? It brought them near to God. They were separated from a holy God because of their sin, but the blood of Christ had made it possible to be brought near.

To summarize, though the Ephesians had previously lacked all the advantages that the ethnic Jews had possessed, God took the initiative to bring them close to himself. This was done by the blood of Jesus, and they became closely associated with Jesus in salvation.

Paul commanded the Ephesians to remember the many disadvantages of their former state of being without Christ compared to their current state of being in Christ. Surely this would bring a great sense of gratitude overflowing in their hearts! (The benefits are further detailed in the next section.)

⁶⁷ See Eph 2:17 for more on peace far and near.

⁶⁸ This is dative of instrument.

Abridged Structural Diagram

(2:1-10)
|
Therefore the Gentiles in flesh (called "uncircumcised...")
| | formerly
remember that **you** were apart from Christ
 | having been excluded from the citizenship
 | | of Israel
 | and
 | foreigners to the covenants of the promise,
 | having no hope
 | and
 | without God in the world.
 |
 But
 | who were formerly far away
 | | now
 | | in Christ Jesus
you were brought near
 | by the blood of Christ.

Tracing the Argument

External: The power of God (1:19) is capable of making alive (2:4) those who were dead in their trespasses and sins (2:1), and it is capable of making Gentiles who were far away (2:13) and Jews who were near (2:17) into one group (2:15).

Internal: The blood of Jesus enables a Gentile to be in Christ, which changes their position from far away to near.

Textual Outline

1. Before salvation, the Ephesians were apart from Christ (11-12).
2. Before salvation, the Ephesians were excluded from the citizenship of Israel (12).
3. Before salvation, the Ephesians were foreigners to the covenants of the promise (12).
4. Before salvation, the Ephesians were without hope (12).
5. Before salvation, the Ephesians were without God (12-13).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 2:11-13 in order to delineate to the Ephesians their spiritual condition before being in Christ.

Teaching Outline

Those who are in Christ remember how Jesus rescued them from their previous, spiritual condition. Today I want you to remember how Jesus rescued you from your spiritual condition before you were in Christ. From our text in Ephesians 2, we are going to see 5 characteristics of being a Gentile.

1. Remember that before we were in Christ, we were apart from Christ (11-12).
2. Remember that before we were in Christ, we were excluded from the citizenship of Israel (12).
3. Remember that before we were in Christ, we were foreigners to the covenants of the promise (12).
4. Remember that before we were in Christ, we were without hope (12).
5. Remember that before we were in Christ, we were without God (12-13).

Ephesians 2:14-18

Limits of the Text

In 2:11-22 Paul wrote about the power of God in salvation, how it brings together Jews and Gentiles into one unified group. After describing the hopeless status of the Gentiles (2:11-13), then he then wrote about their common peace that comes through the cross (2:14-18).

Translation

14 For he himself is our peace, who made both *groups* one and destroyed **the dividing wall of separation**, the hostility, 15 by invalidating in his flesh **the law of the commandments contained in ordinances**, so that he might create **the two** in himself into one new man, *thus* making peace, 16 and might reconcile both *groups* in one body to God through the cross by killing the hostility in himself. 17 And having come he himself proclaimed the message of peace to you, the ones who were far off, and *to us*, the ones who were near, 18 so that through him both *groups* have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit.

Interpretation

Verse 13 stated that the Ephesians were brought near; verses 19-22 will give the results of being near. But in this section, verses 14-18, Paul described how they were brought near.⁶⁹

14 Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ,

14 For he himself is our peace, who made both *groups* one and destroyed **the dividing wall of separation**, the hostility,

This verse continues the thought of the previous verse. Why did the blood of Christ bring the Ephesians near? They were brought near because Christ himself was their peace. When Paul wrote that Jesus was their peace, he was using synecdoche, a literary device where the part stands for the whole. Peace (εἰρήνη) is a part of salvation and thus stands for all of it. "Since, according to the prophets, peace will be an essential characteristic of the messianic kingdom...Christian thought also frequently regards

⁶⁹ Verses 14-16 comprise a single sentence in Greek.

εἰρήνη [peace] as nearly synonymous with messianic salvation.”⁷⁰ The prophets said he would bring peace (Hag 2:9; Zec 9:10) and be the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). In 2:17, God proclaimed the message of peace, that is, the message of salvation; connecting these together reveals that Jesus is the message of salvation.

There are two ways that Jesus is peace. The first way in which Jesus is peace is that he took two distinct groups and made them into one group. “Both” (τὰ ἀμφοτέρω) refers back to the Gentiles and Israel in verses 11 and 12. The category (or class) of “both” must be inferred. Since the Gentiles and the Jews are races (or ethnic groups), one might be tempted to say he made both races one, but God didn’t make a new race; Jews are still Jews, etc. So I chose the more generic word “groups” as it allows for a new spiritual class of people. This idea of a new group is similar to the phrase “one new man” in 2:15. In what way are these two groups now one group? Looking ahead I see the things they can have in common: They can be a new man, they can be reconciled to God, and thus they can approach the Father. This new group does not focus on whether they are citizens or foreigners; it’s something new that can be formed into the church.

But making a new group does not completely explain how the Ephesians were brought near, so Paul continued his thought. The second way in which Jesus is peace is that he destroyed the dividing wall. The dividing wall (τὸ μεσότοιχον) is a *hapax leg*⁷¹ in the New Testament and a compound word from “middle” and “wall.” Paul said the dividing wall was a separation (τοῦ φραγμοῦ) or a barrier. Hostility (τὴν ἔχθραν) is appositional⁷² to wall;⁷³ that is, hostility further explains wall in the sense that the wall creates hostility, which is the opposite of peace.

So what is this dividing wall, this wall that causes separation and is hostility between Gentiles and Jews? Many commentators think this is “an allusion to the wall between the inner and outer courts of the temple,”⁷⁴ which kept the Gentiles separated from the rest of the temple. Josephus mentioned inscriptions in Greek and Latin that said, “No one of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues.”⁷⁵ Paul himself was

⁷⁰ Arndt, 288.

⁷¹ This means it’s the only time this word is used in the New Testament.

⁷² The NET best captures this apposition: “...who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility.”

⁷³ Some translations make hostility the object of the following participle, καταργήσας, thus making law appositional to it; see NASB. Although this is grammatically possible, there are problems with this view. The primary problem is that the law may cause hostility, but it is never referred to as hostility itself (Ro 7:12). Other problems can be found in Hoehner, 372-373.

⁷⁴ Zodhiates, G3320.

⁷⁵ Foulkes, 90.

accused of violating this rule in Ac 21:28-29. The primary objection to this allusion is that it is very Jewish; the Ephesians were unlikely to have even known about this wall. So it's not obvious how this wall could cause such separation and hostility.

Others argue that this is a metaphorical reference to an unintended result of the law. The law was a means of keeping the Jews distinct from the Gentiles through circumcision, dietary laws, interracial marriage restrictions, etc. It should have led the Jews to witness to their neighbors about the awesome God who protected them when they obeyed this law, but in practice it led to an attitude of moral and spiritual superiority that bred hostility.⁷⁶ So the law was a source of antagonism and hatred between Israel and the rest of the world.⁷⁷

Personally, I think the second view is correct. I'm willing to concede the former is conceptually not that different, as it is an outworking of the law in Jewish religious life, but it's probably too obscure to be such a source of hostility. The law, however, could definitely have that effect. Besides, the law is the very thing that Jesus invalidated in the next verse. So if Christ destroyed the hatred created by the law, exactly how did he do that? See the next verse.

In his flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ) is part of verse 14 in NA27, but most likely this phrase is associated with the next participle, invalidating, as opposed to the previous participles, so I moved it to its more proper position in verse 15 in my translation.

15 τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην

15 by invalidating in his flesh the law of the commandments contained in ordinances, so that he might create the two in himself into one new man, thus making peace,

Invalidating (καταργήσας) is an adverbial participle of means, describing how Jesus made both groups one and destroyed the wall. Although the word can mean to destroy or abolish, it is probably used here as more of a legal term meaning to nullify or render ineffective.⁷⁸ Jesus invalidated the law.

Jesus invalidated the law in his flesh, that is, by his physical death on the cross. Note a similar idea in verse 16, where reconciliation to God happens through the cross. How did his death invalidate the law? The death of Christ inaugurated the new covenant.

⁷⁶ Hoehner, 370-371. See also O'Brien 196 and Bruce 296.

⁷⁷ As a New Testament example, see how the disciples treated the Samaritan woman.

⁷⁸ NET Bible.

The Mosaic covenant and its requirements are not legally binding to Christians (whether Jew or Gentile); they have been replaced by the new covenant. Christians are bound to the law of Christ (1 Co 9:21).

Paul described the law as the law of commandments (a law full of commandments⁷⁹), and these commandments can be found in all the various, individual ordinances.⁸⁰ Why describe the law this way? Why not simply call it the law? It seems to focus on the fine-print, calling the reader to pay attention to the details, as if to say, "Look at the all the many ordinances (decrees); there's a bunch of them!" Together they comprise the commandments known collectively as the law. Some have suggested that only the ceremonial law was nullified and the rest remains in force, but there is nothing in the text that indicates such a division or makes such a distinction. The law in its entirety has been invalidated.

How did invalidating the law destroy the wall of separation, the hostility? "Paul's progression in the argument is that Christ has destroyed the symptom, that is, the enmity between Jews and Gentiles, by making inoperative the root or cause, namely, the law of commandments in decrees."⁸¹ Since the law has been invalidated, there is no reason for Jews and Gentiles to hate each other.

There are other texts in the New Testament that discuss the law. How does Christ's invalidation of the law relate to them? "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17, NASB95). Jesus did not come to destroy the law,⁸² but to fulfill it. Because the Messiah would come to redeem the world, the law pointed ahead to him; thus, he fulfilled it. Jesus made no statement about the purpose of the law post-cross, only that that it would not be abolished. So as long as it still has some purpose, this verse doesn't contradict Ep 2:15.

"Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Ro 3:31, NASB95). Given that faith (alone) justifies (3:28), is there any purpose for the law? Paul said yes, but commentators disagree on that purpose. Some say Christians obey the law by having faith in Christ, ala Ro 8:4.⁸³ Others say the moral part of the law must still be kept by Christians, ala Ro 13:8-10.⁸⁴ Still others says it still exists to point people to Jesus, ala Ga 3:24-25.⁸⁵ I think this argument has the

⁷⁹ Genitive of content.

⁸⁰ Dative of sphere.

⁸¹ Hoehner, 377.

⁸² Different verb from invalidate, though it has semantic overlap.

⁸³ Moo, 255.

⁸⁴ Schreiner, 208.

⁸⁵ Pearl, 51.

greatest strength and follows the context best. The law could never justify, but it could convict of sin. So the law still has a purpose for unbelievers, but not for believers. This verse neither conflicts with nor contradicts Ep 2:15. The law still has a purpose, but not for those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

“Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Ga 3:24-25, NET). Those who have been declared righteous by faith are no longer under the guardianship of the law. The law has served its purpose of conducting them to Christ, so for such people it is no longer needed. So in a manner similar to Ro 3:31, this verse neither conflicts with nor contradicts Eph 2:15. The law still has a purpose, but not for those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

“But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Ro 7:6, NASB95). As wife is free from marriage when her husband dies (7:3), so the believer is free from the law (7:4). Thus believers are released from the condemnation of the law so that we may serve in the new life of Spirit. So in a manner similar to Ro 3:31, this verse neither conflicts with nor contradicts Eph 2:15. The law still has a purpose, but not for those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Ro 10:4, NASB95). The Jews missed Christ and were still trying to be righteous by observing the law (10:3). How did Paul know that the Jews, having heard about Christ, did not subject themselves to God’s plan for righteousness? This verse is complex and there are multiple interpretations. One is that Christ brings to an end the use of the law as a means of righteousness for those who have faith. Those who believe don’t try to use the law to be justified. This interpretation complements Ep 2:15 without overlapping it. Another is that Christ is the goal to which the law pointed, and the result is righteousness is found in believing in him. The law pointed to Christ, and since Christ is here believe in him to be justified. In a manner similar to Ro 3:31, this interpretation neither conflicts with nor contradicts Ep 2:15.

So to conclude this question, I find that Ep 2:15 does not contradict other passages that speak about the law. Christians are not under the Mosaic Law. Its purpose was to point the Jews to their need for a Savior, and it can still function in that fashion today.

The verse continues with a *ἵνα* clause, denoting the two purposes of invalidating the law. Note that both verbs (create and reconcile) are subjunctive; invalidating the law makes these possible, but they don’t automatically happen for everyone. The first

purpose is creating one new man. The verb create (κτίση), has a spiritual, not physical, sense; the usage is both similar to and related to 2:10 (we were created in Christ Jesus for good works). Christ has taken the two (ethnic groups) and re-created them into one (spiritual group).

Paul said that Christ created the two into one new man. In verse 14 the two groups, Gentiles and Jews, became one group that is the church. The same two groups of people are in view here in verse 15, so one new man must refer to the church. The church is described with the metaphor of a man, giving the idea that the church will be a “new humanity, a new people of God.”⁸⁶ Jews don’t become Gentiles, Gentiles don’t become Jews, and the best of each aren’t amalgamated together; when Christ created the church, he created something brand new.⁸⁷

The result of the new man is peace. In this verse, peace does not stand for salvation (as in verse 14); peace means peace. Jesus made peace (εἰρήνην), the state of harmony or tranquility. Although salvation does bring peace between God and man, the emphasis here is peace between Jew and Gentile. The law had the intended effect of creating hostility; the death of Christ had the intentional effect of creating peace. The next step, reconciliation, will focus on man’s relationship to God (see 2:16).

Verses 14-15 appear to be a chiasm. Chiasms emphasize the middle, so the emphasis would be the destruction of the wall by the invalidation of the flesh.

A For he himself is our peace,
B who made both groups one
C and destroyed the dividing wall of separation, the hostility,
C’ by invalidating in his flesh the law of the commandments,
B’ so that he might create the two in himself into one new man,
A’ thus making peace,

16 καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ.

16 and might reconcile both *groups* in one body to God through the cross by killing the hostility in himself.

The second purpose for invalidating the law is reconciliation to God. Reconciliation (ἀποκαταλλάξῃ) is “the restoration of a relationship of peace which has been

⁸⁶ Vaughan, 60.

⁸⁷ O’Brien, 200.

disturbed.”⁸⁸ Humanity’s relationship with God was severely damaged in the Fall, and at the cross that relationship can now be restored.

Christ might reconcile both groups in one body. There are two ways to understand “body.” The first possibility is that one body refers to Christ’s physical body. Christ reconciled two groups in his body to God. This is done through the cross, which is the death of his physical body. Support for this position comes from Co 1:22, which says, “he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (ESV). Reconcile is closely tied to body, which is a body of flesh.

The second possibility is that one body refers to the universal body of Christ, the catholic church. Christ invalidated the law in order to reconcile both groups who are already in one body, the church, to God.⁸⁹ Support for this position comes from the use of “body” in Ephesians and from the word “one.” Nearly every use of “body” in Ephesians refers to the church, so this probably does as well. If Paul had meant Christ’s body he would have said “his” body (as he did in Co 1:22), not “one” body.

Both possibilities seem possible, though every commentary that I own says that it refers to the church. Given Paul’s argument in this passage, which does indeed emphasize this new group, the church, which Christ created, I’m willing to let my “counselors” persuade me.

The order of these verbs seems odd to me. Christ created the church (2:15) before saving (reconciling) the members of the church. As one writer said, Paul seems to putting ecclesiology ahead of soteriology.⁹⁰ O’Brien nicely critiques this issue. Paul is not giving a chronology of salvation but rather an emphasis of salvation. Since the issue in this pericope (Ep 2:11-22) is the division between Jew and Gentile, it’s natural that Paul addressed it first.⁹¹

Christ reconciled both groups through the cross by killing the hostility in himself. It may seem that Paul was referring back to the hostility in verse 15, but I think it’s a different hostility. That hostility was between Jew and Gentile; this hostility is between God and mankind. That hostility was removed by invalidating what separated them, the law; this hostility was removed by the cross, which allowed reconciliation. This elimination is the completion of “he is our peace” in 2:14.

⁸⁸ Zodhiates, G604.

⁸⁹ Vaughan, 61.

⁹⁰ Merkel, quoted in O’Brien, 202.

⁹¹ O’Brien, 202.

17 καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς·

17 And having come he himself proclaimed the message of “peace to you, the ones who were far off, and *to us*, the ones who were near,”

The “and” connects to the start of verse 14. Jesus is our peace, and Jesus proclaimed peace.

The middle voice of the verb proclaimed (εὐηγγελίσατο) is intensive, meaning the stress is placed on Jesus’ involvement in the proclamation. This verb is often translated as preach, but the proclamation didn’t look anything like a typical American Sunday morning service, so I translated it as proclaim instead.

Jesus proclaimed the message of peace. As in 2:14, peace again stands in for salvation. Jesus proclaimed salvation, and since Jesus is our peace, that means Jesus proclaimed himself as the means of peace. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’” (Jn 14:6, NASB95).

Jesus proclaimed this message ever to those who were far off, to those he never personally spoke to. This sounds like an impossibility, but the previous verses are connected to the participle “having come.” In verses 14-16 Christ made peace possible through the cross; “having come” refers back to back to his death. Thus the proclamation of the message of peace was post-resurrection. Vaughan says when the apostles preached it, Christ preached it.⁹² Hoehner has a similar idea, except that it is the preaching of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.⁹³

The quote in this verse is from Is 57:19, but the context is different. In Isaiah, he was referring to Jews who were near and Jews who were far; here Paul referred to Jews as near and Gentiles as far. Paul used the expression but gave it Christological meaning.

18 ὅτι δι’ αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα.

18 so that through him both *groups* have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit.

⁹² Vaughan, 62.

⁹³ Hoehner, 385.

Jesus proclaimed the message of peace, and the result was the right to approach the Father. The right to approach (προσαγωγήν) is the “opportunity to address someone, implying higher status of the person addressed,”⁹⁴ and is also used in 3:12. In classical Greek this word would be used of subjects being granted access to see their king. O’Brien thinks Paul would have had Old Testament cultic imagery in mind, where a person makes a burnt offering at the tabernacle and then is accepted before God (Lv 1:3).⁹⁵ Before accepting the message of peace, the Ephesians were not allowed an audience with the Father; they were not allowed to approach him or speak with him. It seems that Paul had adoption in mind, because throughout this chapter God has been called God, but in this verse he’s called Father. Accepting and believing the message of peace leads to adoption, which makes God Father, which results in being able to approach him (Hb 4:16).

They have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit. “In (ἐν) one Spirit” is dative of instrument, which means that possessing the Spirit is the means of approaching the Father.

The Trinity is evident in the text: Approach the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

⁹⁴ Louw, 1:396.

⁹⁵ O’Brien, 209.

Abridged Structural Diagram

you were brought near (vs 13)
|
For
he himself is our peace,
| who made both groups one
| and
| destroyed the dividing wall of separation,
| by invalidating in his flesh the law of the commandments,
| so that
| he might create the two in himself into one new man,
| | thus making peace,
| and
| might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross
| by killing the hostility in himself.
And
| having come
he proclaimed the message of peace to you,
| | the ones who were far off,
| and
| to us, the ones who were near,
so that
| through him
both groups have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit.

Tracing the Argument

External: The power of God is capable of making alive (2:4) those who were dead in their trespasses and sins. It is capable of making Gentiles who were far away (2:13) and Jews who were near into one group, bringing peace and the right to approach God.

Internal: The Gentiles were on the outside of the covenants looking in; they were without hope and without God. But Jesus made peace possible, peace between Jew and Gentile and peace between God and man. And then he proclaimed the message of peace, which, if accepted, enables both to approach God. By the cross is God brought near to those who were far away.

Textual Outline

1. The gospel brought peace to the Ephesians by creating one new man (14-15).
2. The gospel brought peace to the Ephesians by reconciling them to God (16).
3. The gospel brought peace to the Ephesians by giving them the right to approach the Father (17-18).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Eph 2:14-18 in order to explain how the gospel brings peace.

Teaching Outline

The gospel is peace. Today I want you to remember that the gospel is only thing that brings peace to our world. From this text in Eph 2 we are going to see 3 results of the gospel of peace.

1. Remember that the gospel of peace brought us into the church (14-15).
2. Remember that the gospel of peace reconciled us to God (16).
3. Remember that the gospel of peace gave us the right to approach our Father (17-18).

Ephesians 2:19-22

Limits of the Text

In 2:11-22 Paul wrote about the power of God in salvation, how it brings together Jews and Gentiles into one unified group. After describing the hopeless status of the Gentiles (2:11-13) and their common peace that comes through the cross (2:14-18), he finished this section by describing them as a unified building.

Translation

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and temporary residents, **but** you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the family of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the entire building, being joined together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom also **you** are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Interpretation

The Gentiles had a hopeless condition, but they were brought near by the blood of Christ. This happened because Jesus is peace, and he proclaimed peace. Using metaphors, Paul listed three results (or implications) of being brought near for Gentiles in this final sub-section. Verses 19-22 are a single sentence in Greek.

19 Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ,

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and temporary residents, **but** you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the family of God,

“So then” (Ἄρα οὖν) denotes both the conclusion of the previous section and consequences from it.⁹⁶ It looks back to verse 13, where the Ephesians were brought near, and it brings out the implications of nearness.

The first implication is that the Ephesians were citizens. In 2:12 Paul said the Ephesians were foreigners to the covenants of promise, but that was no longer true; they were no longer foreigners and temporary residents. A foreigner (ξένος) is someone from

⁹⁶ Hoehner, 391.

another country; a temporary resident (πάροικοι) is “a person who for a period of time lives in a place which is not his normal residence.”⁹⁷ Although the first word may focus on legal status and the second on the temporariness of residency, these words are basically synonymous. They could not own land, and they had very few rights.⁹⁸ Which it came to the privileges of citizenship, the Ephesians were on the outside looking in.

In sharp contrast to being foreigners and temporary residents (ἀλλὰ), Paul said that now they were fellow-citizens (συμπολίται) with the holy ones. This word is not used anywhere else in the New Testament nor is it in the LXX. Without the prefix (σύν) it means citizen, “a fellow member of a socio-political unit,”⁹⁹ the exact opposite of being a foreigner. The prefix, “together,” enhances the meaning and thus stresses the unity they had with the holy ones. In 1:1 it was noted that holy ones (ἁγίων) has the idea of those who are holy, those who are dedicated and consecrated to the service of God.¹⁰⁰ In 1:1 it referred to the members of the local church in Ephesus;¹⁰¹ here in 2:19 it refers to all members of the kingdom of God, the church universal.¹⁰²

The metaphor of citizenship implies that the rights and privileges of citizenship in the kingdom of God were now theirs. In 2:12, Paul described the Gentiles as being excluded from the citizenship of Israel. In 2:19, the exact opposite is true. They gained the testimony of Jesus from the apostles and the revelation of Jesus from the prophets (part of which they received in this letter!). They knew what God was like, what he had done for them, and what he expected of them. They had God’s gifts to the church—both offices and spiritual gifts—to edify them (4:11). And the Ephesians had these rights in equal proportions with the Jews in their church.

The second implication is that the Ephesians were members of a family. Paul said they were also members of the family (οἰκεῖοι) of God. The word has the idea of being kin or a blood relative, and it’s the exact opposite of being a temporary resident. The NIV captures this idea in Ga 6:10, which uses this same word: “Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” The metaphor of being in God’s family implies the same things that adoption as sons implied in 1:5: a

⁹⁷ Louw, 1:132.

⁹⁸ Foulkes, 92.

⁹⁹ Louw, 1:131.

¹⁰⁰ Some consider holy ones to be a reference to angels, but this meaning is not in context here, nor is this word used to mean angels elsewhere in Ephesians.

¹⁰¹ As does the word “all” in 1:15.

¹⁰² Paul also used the idea of citizenship in both Php 1:27, but he used it in different ways. In Ephesians he was referring to the privileges of citizenship; in Philippians he was referring to the responsibilities of citizenship.

relationship to God and other believers (see notes on 1:5 for more details). It includes the right to approach the Father (2:18).

In summary, in his death Christ formed a new unit, the church (2:14-16). Jews who believe and Gentiles who believe are both members in this unit. They are fellow citizens and family members with all the rights and privileges therein.

20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ,

20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

The third implication is that the Ephesians were part of a building, specifically a temple (2:21). Foundation (θεμελίω) is a word that literally refers to the “supporting base for a structure.”¹⁰³ In New Testament times this foundation would probably have been one or more stones. Paul used this word here in a figurative sense, because the apostles and the prophets were the foundation.¹⁰⁴ Paul said that his readers were built upon (ἐποικοδομηθέντες) this foundation. Notice that this participle is in the aorist tense; the building of the Ephesians upon this foundation was complete at the time of Paul’s writing. It is also passive voice. The Ephesians hadn’t laid this foundation; God had. Together these point to the fact that God had saved them, and when he did they became pieces of a building, stones added to a foundation for the purpose of building a larger building, which is this new entity called the church.

In this building there is a cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαίου), who is Jesus. This clause is a genitive absolute; though thematically connected to the rest of the sentence, it is not syntactically connected. O’Brien believes the grammar “draws attention to his standing and special function.”¹⁰⁵ The cornerstone is the first stone laid to start the foundation.¹⁰⁶ Every stone is measured against it, so if it is set improperly, the rest of the foundation will be misaligned and so will the building. The imagery comes from the Old Testament. In Is 28:16, the nation was trusting an alliance with Assyria, but God declared that their salvation would only come through his cornerstone, a reference to the Messiah, which Jesus quoted of himself (Mt 21:42) as did Peter (1 Pt 2:6).¹⁰⁷ Christ is

¹⁰³ Arndt, 448.

¹⁰⁴ Some argue that the apostles laid the foundation (MacArthur, 82), often in an attempt to harmonize this usage of the building metaphor with 1 Co 3:10.

¹⁰⁵ O’Brien, 216.

¹⁰⁶ To be fair, some scholars think that the correct translation here is keystone or capstone, meaning Jesus the final stone that completes the building. So Lincoln, see his arguments 154-156. Contra Hoehner, see 405-407.

¹⁰⁷ See also Zech 10:4.

the cornerstone of his church. Chronologically he was set first with his death and resurrection. Doctrinally everything must be aligned to him. Any person or teaching that does not conform to his teachings and to his gospel is not from Christ and is not part of his church.

Jesus is the cornerstone, and based on him is set the rest of the foundation, the apostles and prophets (4:11). An apostle is a messenger or ambassador sent by Jesus into the world for the “specific tasks of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and establishing and building up the churches.”¹⁰⁸ The apostles are the twelve apostles, though it probably includes Paul (1 Co 15:9) and may even include the small “a” apostles as well.¹⁰⁹

Are these Old Testament prophets or New Testament prophets? The prophets are probably New Testament prophets. One, the order is apostles then prophets. If he had meant Old Testament prophets, I would expect the reverse order. Two, the context is the church. The Old Testament prophets called Israel to repentance; they didn’t build the church. Three, in 3:5 apostles and prophets reveal the mystery of Christ concerning Gentiles in the church, and in 4:11 they equip the church.

New Testament prophets are “proclaimers of God’s revelation in Christ.”¹¹⁰ From 1 Co 14:3, 31 they speak to edify, exhort, console, and teach the church.¹¹¹ From Ep 4:11-12 they equip the saints and build up the body of Christ. From 1 Co 14:22, they are given as a help for believers, not unbelievers. As the example of Agabus indicates, there is even a predictive element in their ministry at times (Ac 11:28, 21:10).

How did apostles differ from prophets? Both nouns are governed by a single article, which implies that the focus in this verse is on their unity not their differences. So their ministries apparently overlapped; still, Hoehner believes there was a different emphasis. “The emphasis for the apostle was more of the divine commission to a specific task; for the prophet, however, it was the communication of divine revelation.”¹¹²

The Ephesians were built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. “It points them to their roots and to the source of the normative teaching that is necessary if they

¹⁰⁸ Hoehner, 400.

¹⁰⁹ See Ro 16:7 for examples.

¹¹⁰ O’Brien, 216.

¹¹¹ See also Ac 15:32.

¹¹² Hoehner, 401.

are not to be confused and shaken by erroneous ideas.”¹¹³ If the Ephesians were aligned with the teachings of the apostles and prophets, then they knew they were aligned with the teachings and gospel of Christ.

Are there still apostles and prophets today? These offices have continued, at least not in the same sense Paul spoke of here. They were unique in that they personally knew Jesus and were given a task by him for the foundation of the church. Now there is a sense that one could use these words today. Apostle means one who is sent, so if a church sent a missionary or church planter out, I suppose he could be considered a small “a” apostle. And the spiritual gift of prophecy, forth-telling God’s already revealed truth, is still active, so I suppose one who has this gift could be considered a prophet. But I would not personally use these terms, as they are likely to cause confusion and division in the church.

21 ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὖξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, **22** ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

[21 in whom the entire building, being joined together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom also you are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.](#)

These two verses express one and the same thought, functioning almost like parallelism in Hebrew poetry, thus I’ve combined them together. In them, Paul further explained the building in verse 20. In both verses the prepositional phrase “in whom” (ἐν ᾧ) points back to Christ.

First, it is a living building, one still under construction. The church is not the building over on Main Street; it is a living organism. This is seen from the three active tense verbs. It is growing (αὖξει), and while it is growing it is being joined together (συναρμολογουμένη) and being built together (συνοικοδομεῖσθε). In a similar fashion, Peter said his readers were living stones who were being built as a spiritual house (1 Pt 2:5).

Growing means to be increasing in quantity and quality. The church is to be continually adding new members. The church is to be a witness, leading other people to become stones in the building. The church is also to be increasing in holiness, helping each other to become more like the holy God who inhabits it. It will continue growing until the Lord returns.

¹¹³ Lincoln, 154.

Joined together, a verb that is unique to here and 4:16, appears to have been coined by Paul and has the idea of fitting together well. Today it is simple to fit bricks or stones together using mortar. In Paul's day, the stones had to be cut and smoothed so that they fit together on their own.¹¹⁴ Notice that it is passive voice; God is doing the joining.

Built together has the idea of construction materials being assembled together to make a building. This building is being constructed from the lives of believers, and together compromise the temple. This verb is also passive, noting God's activity. Although not so obvious in English, the "you" is plural. All members of the church are being built together. There is a corporate emphasis here, not an individual emphasis.

Although joined together and built together are not synonymous, they are certainly related. They emphasize unity and community; God, like a master builder, is carefully putting the pieces of his building together, connecting lives and edifying them together. And this connection is not only with each other, it's also with previous generations, including the apostles and prophets (because we teach what they taught) and Christ himself (because we teach what he taught and we trust in him).

In 2:20 the Ephesians have been built, but in this verse they are being built; why the difference? The built in 2:20 refers to their initial salvation, their justification; this is how they became part of the building. In this verse it refers to the way God is growing them with other believers; this is how they are being changed to be a better building.

Second, this building is a holy temple (ναὸν ἅγιον), which is the dwelling place of God. There are two different Greek words—ἱερόν and ναός—translated temple, but they are nuanced. "The naós is strictly the sanctuary as compared to broader terms for the precincts as a whole. It can be used even more narrowly for the innermost shrine that houses the god."¹¹⁵ While ἱερόν was used to refer to the entire temple complex, ναός was used only of the interior part of a temple where the deity dwelled (Ac 17:24). In the Old Testament, this is where God's glory descended and dwelled (2 Chr 7:1-3). But if Paul's choice of the word ναός in verse 21 only implies the idea of a place where God dwells, verse 22 makes it explicit. A dwelling place (κατοικητήριον) is simply the place where someone lives or exists, and the church is where God dwells; there's a sense of permanency about this word. But it's not any kind of dwelling, it is a holy temple, a dwelling place that is dedicated and consecrated to God. God dwells in his church through the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Hoehner, 409.

¹¹⁵ Kittel, TDNTA, 625.

¹¹⁶ See also 1 Co 3:16 and 2 Co 6:16.

The Trinity is again noticeable: The church is built in Christ into God's dwelling place in the Spirit.

Some have speculated that there may have been a relationship between this temple and Solomon's temple. Although possible, it seems unlikely. First, Paul used the idea of a temple as a metaphor to explain the church, but it's not certain that he had the temple in Jerusalem in mind. Although Jews would have been familiar with Solomon's temple (or more likely the second temple), the Ephesians would probably have been more familiar with Artemis' temple (Ac 19:27). The metaphor works either way. Second, Jesus obsoleted the temple in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament cult,¹¹⁷ God's people came to the temple to worship him; in the new covenant, God's people worship him wherever they are (Jn 4:23-24).

What does the metaphor of being part of a building imply? What does it mean to have God dwell within us? There are several aspects of this metaphor. One, there is a sense of unity and community. Being a Christian is about being "us," not being "me." Two, God has taken up residence in the church. Everything we do is about worship; life in service to God is worship. Three, God works through the church, and the church is his representatives on earth. Thus the church needs to be holy, both so that he can work effectively and so that they represent him well.

To summarize the entire section: "Through...the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, aliens become citizens, strangers become family, idolaters become the temple of the true God, the hopeless inherit the promises of God, those without Christ become one in Christ, those far off are brought near, and the godless are reconciled to God."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ In this context cult doesn't mean some wacko religious group, it means any organized system of worship.

¹¹⁸ MacArthur, 83.

Abridged Structural Diagram

you were brought near (vs 13)
|
So then
you are no longer foreigners and temporary residents
but
you are fellow citizens w/ the holy ones
 and
 members of the family of God
built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
[Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone]
 in whom
 the entire building is growing into a holy temple
 being joined together
 in whom
 you are being built together into a dwelling place

Tracing the Argument

External: The power of God is capable of making alive (2:4) those who were dead in their trespasses and sins. It is capable of making Gentiles who were far away (2:13) and Jews who were near into one group, bringing peace and the right to approach God.

Internal: The Ephesians were without any of the privileges of being God's people, but by the blood of Christ, their status changed (2:11-13). Christ brought about this change by being their peace—by destroying what separated them from God's people—and by preaching peace to them (2:14-18). As a result, the Ephesians had the privileges of citizenship, family, and templeship.

Textual Outline

1. The gospel of peace made the Ephesians citizens with the holy ones (19).
2. The gospel of peace made the Ephesians members of the family of God (19).
3. The gospel of peace made the Ephesians a holy temple, the dwelling place of God (20-22).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Eph 2:19-22 in order to list the privileges of salvation.

Teaching Outline

Salvation brings privileges. Today, I want you to know and believe that when God saved us, he also gave us great privileges. From our text in Eph 2 we are going to see 3 privileges of salvation.

1. Believe that by the gospel of peace we are citizens of God's kingdom (19).
2. Believe that by the gospel of peace we are members of God's family (19).
3. Believe that by the gospel of peace we are temple of God himself (20-22).

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