

# EPHESIANS CHAPTER 2

## EPHESIANS 2:1-2

### DEAD IN SIN

When you consult a doctor the first thing you are asked is, “What is your problem?” If a student performs poorly the teacher wants to know the reason why. When a company makes losses it must investigate. So it is axiomatic that if a solution to a problem is to be found the problem must first be as fully understood as is possible. Why are there never-ending problems in this world from a personal to an international level? The Bible is absolutely clear that it is **SIN**, which entered through Adam’s disobedience. So there is sickness and death, so there is war, injustice, and oppression. So it is incumbent on us to accurately understand what sin is, what it means to be a sinner, and the implications. This is what Paul goes on to do in Ephesians 2:1-3. Why does he do this? We might think that with a new chapter there is a totally new subject, but remember the chapter and verse divisions were inserted into the Bible many centuries later. Paul wants us to know for sure “the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe” (1:19), the very power that raised and highly exalted Christ (1:20-21). Because this sin has made us absolutely helpless to do anything to save ourselves such immeasurably great power must be exercised if anyone is to be saved. Having demonstrated our helplessness (2:1-3), Paul continues by magnifying the power and grace of God. But the first word that explains the awful condition of sin is ‘dead’.

#### 1. WE WERE SPIRITUALLY DEAD

What a terrible word “dead” is. The aphorism says, ‘While there is life there is hope’. The ruler of the synagogue earnestly implored Jesus to come and lay hands on his little daughter to make her well as she was “at the point of death” (Mark 5:23). But when she died people said, “Why trouble the Teacher any further?” (v. 35). Once Jesus had died the women were so hopeless that they just came to prepare the dead body with spices. There is only one possible hope, “the working of God’s great might”, His resurrection power.

Obviously those about whom Paul was writing were physically alive; but in another sense they were dead (cf. 1 Timothy 5:6). Just as a physically dead person does not respond to any external stimulus, so a spiritually dead person does not respond to any spiritual stimulus. Spiritual death is being separated from God, having no spiritual life (see v. 5). There is no spiritual understanding, no spiritual desire, no ability to do the things God wants.

Remember what you were like before you were raised by God from spiritual death. God was always speaking to you but you could not hear as if you were a dead person. The heavens were declaring the glory of God (Psalm 19:1, see also Romans 1:20) but we could not see it. God’s hand was providing, protecting and guiding (Acts 14:17) but we did not recognize it. Many times conscience told us ‘No!’ or accused us after we had done something (Romans 2:15) but we did not heed it as the voice of God. Many of us heard the Bible at home, in Sunday School, and preaching, but although we might have been respectful we refused to heed.

The most awful thing about being dead is that a dead person can do nothing for himself; he is not even aware of his hopeless situation; he does not know that he fails to come up to God's standards. So the Bible is quite clear that an unsaved person is **dead** spiritually, and not just sick, or in a coma, or even at the point of death (see also Colossians 2:13). This is why salvation is described as a resurrection (Ephesians 2:6, Colossians 2:12, 3:1). If anyone is going to be saved GOD Himself must do a resurrection type work.

## 2. WE WERE VERY ACTIVE IN SIN

This condition of death has to do with "trespasses and sins"; sin that has caused death. Adam sinned, lost fellowship with God, and was expelled from the Garden (Genesis 3:10,24). Through Adam all are accounted sinners, for death spread to all people (Romans 5:12,17). "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). Sin separates from the gracious presence of God, and this is what the Bible calls 'death'. Let us be sure that God hates sin, "He cannot look at wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13); neither does He wink at it.

- So death is *firstly* a judicial action of God, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Yet we continue to be very active, '*walking* in trespasses and sins'. 'Walking' is a picture of behaviour, a characteristic way of life. The adding of the word "sins" to trespasses is just a way of emphasizing that we are both failures and rebels before God. There is a fullness and variety of sin, in thought, word and deed, both of commission and omission.
- So death is *secondly* a deliberate choice we make, by which we walk in way we think is right (Proverbs 16:25). An objection is often raised: 'But we do not all live in immorality, hatred and blasphemy.' It is true, there are many good and respectable people on the outside; but sin is in the heart, pride and lust, and what we fail to do. Jesus had strongest words of condemnation for very religious Pharisees, hypocrites!

### Two doctrines to learn:

(1) **Total Inability.** We are totally unable to do anything to save ourselves from sin. This is true of all people, as "we *all* once lived in the passions of our flesh" and we were "like the *rest of mankind*" (see 2:3). The Bible is very clear: "No one *can* come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44,65); "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it *cannot*. Those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God" (Romans 8:7-8); "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is *not able* to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Why do people fight this clear Biblical teaching? Is it not because it totally humbles us, and removes any possibility of works-salvation, of doing anything of merit? Be honest, it is hard to admit that you are not able to do something. We usually resist help until we completely fail. For example, a simple thing like getting the top off a jar, or unlocking a door. And where there is a failure to have an adequate view of sin as involving total inability then God's work in salvation is devalued, and His grace is slighted, the very things emphasized in this passage!

(2) **Salvation is of the Lord.** Salvation is possible only by the working of God's immeasurably great power. Only God has power to raise the dead, so such are totally dependent upon Him. It is often strongly objected, 'Why are sinners exhorted if they cannot do anything? Surely,

such exhortations imply ability, free-will!’ But Jesus exhorted Lazarus to come out of tomb though he had been dead four days. Jesus invites anyone to come to Him, although He says they cannot unless drawn by the Father (John. 6:35-44). Having declared that “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27), He immediately goes on to invite them to Himself, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden...” (v. 28). The reality is that there is divine power in preaching of gospel of Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 1:18). How else do you explain how you became a Christian? Do you say, ‘Once I was dead, living in sin?’ Do you look back and proclaim, ‘Unless the Lord had opened my eyes I would still be in darkness?’ ‘Thank the Lord that He had mercy upon me when I was helpless and hopeless.’

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## **EPHESIANS 2:2-3**

### **CONDEMNED SLAVES**

#### **1. A THREEFOLD SLAVERY**

The boundaries of our knowledge of God’s creation are constantly being pushed back, whether in the area of outer space, the particles in the atom, the DNA structure of the human genome, not to mention cyber space. But there is one area where it seems no advance is being made – the knowledge of **ourselves** as human beings. Look at our world which is so full of resources, knowledge, good laws, fair speeches, international organizations, but ... there seems to be no end to wars, fighting for power, strife, abuse of the body, selfishness. Have you ever asked the question, ‘Why is the world like this?’ It is to the God who records the creation and fall of man in the Bible that we look for the true psychology, what we are by nature, and why we live the way we do. The passage before us is designed to show our hopeless condition unless God powerfully intervenes. The basic misunderstanding is to think that we are *free* to do whatever we choose, whenever we choose; that human beings are basically good and reasonable. This is tragic falsehood of the highest order. The Bible is very clear that there are three forces or powers that determine the way we live. We will use the language of slavery to describe them as we cannot free ourselves from them; only the Lord can free us!

#### **(1) We Are Slaves To The World**

“following the course of this world” (2:2)

“Following” has the idea of walking according to a path that has already been laid out, that is, the course of this world. “This world” is not the inhabitable earth, but the world of men living in opposition to God, having an attitude of refusal that God should rule over them (1 Corinthians 1:20-21, James 1:27, 1 John 2:15-17). “Course” translates the word ‘age’, which refers to this present time in history which is characterized by evil (Romans 12:2, Galatians 1:4). What is the path or example that is followed? People follow their fellows on earth rather than God’s heavenly kingdom, the present transient age rather than the eternal age to come (see 2 Corinthians 4:18). By nature all live for what they can see, what they can have in this life. People live for eating & drinking, for entertainment, for possessions, for success, even

for education and family. How do we know this is true? It is what they are always talking about, it is what they are spending their time doing. If God is there at all, only lip service is paid to Him, just a formality trying to cover all bases in the hope of future favour.

## **(2) We Are Slaves To The Devil**

“following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2)

The devil is not taken seriously today. Perhaps it is because he cannot be seen. But is there any real explanation for all the trouble and evil in the world, unless he exists? The Bible explains that it was because of the devil that sin entered the world (Genesis 3), and Job went through such great sufferings (Job 1-2); and it was because of the devil that the Jewish leaders refused to believe in our Lord (John 8:43-44). There is a prince or ruler over all the evil forces in the region of air around us (so Matthew 12:24). Three times Jesus calls him the “ruler” of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). If he is a ruler then he works powerfully in the world, but he is a spirit characterized by disobedience to God. He controls externally as the ruler of all the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12), and internally in our thoughts, affections and desires. He was behind Peter’s adamant refusal that Jesus should be killed (Matthew 16:23), Judas’ betrayal (Luke 22:3), Ananias and Sapphira’s lies (Acts 5:3), the claims of the false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:14-15), and heretical doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Yet none of them knew this because they were deceived. Let me ask you. You know there is a God in heaven who made you and to whom you are responsible, so why do you not live your life in subjection to Him? One of the answers is that the devil has put thoughts into your mind to excuse you. It could be that the so-called claims of science are true; or God’s warnings of judgement are only scare tactics; that God is love so there will not be any final judgement; you are not as bad a sinner as others who certainly deserve judgement. Although the devil is not divine, but only a created being, let us not doubt his power (the same word used of God in 1:19-20). Now we begin to understand why there is so much killing (of all kinds) and lying, for he was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44).

## **(3) We Are Slaves To The Flesh**

“among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of body and mind” (2:3)

Someone says, ‘Maybe this is true of pagans, idolaters, the poor and illiterate who know no better.’ But Paul confesses that it is equally true of him and his fellow Jews. The most wicked things were done by the Pharisees in the name of God, and they were most religious people. Yet they were proud, hypocritical, unjust and murderers! This flesh within is an ally of the devil and world without. The “flesh” is my human nature as a sinner (Romans 7:18, 8:4-8) as opposed to the Spirit of God indwelling and controlling me. The works of the flesh include anything that I can do without the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3-6, Galatians 5:19-21).

- The flesh has “passions” (lusts), here things contrary to God’s will.
- These passions give rise to “desires” (wills), a determination and plan to fulfil them. They can be for the baser appetites of the “body”, or the more refined ones of the “mind”. For example, one person finds life fulfilled in entertainment, another in incessant study, but both are of the flesh.

- The desires are “carried out” in practice (see James 1:14-15). For example, King Ahab had a passion for Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21). When it was refused him he sulked and did not eat. With his wife he made plans, and when they were fulfilled he got possession of the coveted thing.

The flesh, sometimes called Original Sin, or the sin with which we are born, is our problem. It is the source from which life flows, and so determines the character of our life (Matthew 12:33-35). Because the source is sinful, everything coming forth from it is also sinful. If there is going to be change the source must be changed. We can no more change our nature (the flesh) than we can make ourselves alive. This is why conversion is a work of God’s immeasurable power, changing our nature, taking out the heart of stone and putting in a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), giving a new birth (John 3:1-8). Are you such a Christian? Can you say, ‘Once I was a slave to sin, now I have been set free’? And do you give all the credit to God’s work in Jesus Christ and nothing to yourself?

## **2. CONDEMNED!**

“and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (2:3)

It is an awful moment when the Judge bangs the table for silence, a hush descends over the courtroom, the sentence is pronounced, the accused is found guilty and sentenced to death. The audience groans. Ephesians 2:3 is such a pronouncement: You may not think your condition is very serious, that God will not punish you because your good deeds are more than your bad ones, or because you are religious unlike many others. But it does not matter what you think about yourself; the attitude of the Judge is the only thing to take into account. We shall ask three questions.

### **(1) What Is God’s Attitude Towards Us?**

You have heard it so many times, everyone is told, ‘God loves you, God is good all the time’. This is wonderfully true for the Christian; otherwise we are described as “*children of wrath*”. Wrath is anger. In God it is a constant, unvarying opposition to all evil, that must result in punishment (Exodus 34:6-7, Romans 1:18, 2:8-9, Colossians 3:6, Revelation 19:15). See how terrible is God’s wrath in the great Flood, the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the extermination of the Canaanites. It is no different under the New Testament, for there is predicted the great tribulation at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; and above all the cross of our Lord. Don’t try to soften it by responding, ‘God hates the sin but loves the sinner’. It is the person who sins and, as the one responsible, receives the judgement (see John 3:36, Ephesians 5:6). “Children of wrath” is a Hebraism, a strong Hebrew way of saying, this is true, the person surely deserves wrath and it will come (see 2 Samuel 12:5, where “deserves to die” literally is ‘son of death’). This is the awful truth of Scripture from beginning to end, that God is so opposed to the sinner that eternal judgement shall surely fall on all who do not repent. You may think God is not angry with you because life is proceeding quite well, but so it was in the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-30), like the calf fattened for the slaughter.

### **(2) For How Long Has God Had This Attitude?**

Did it develop as we grew up passing out of the so-called innocence of childhood? Is it as we have grown up into adulthood and have deliberately chosen our way instead of God’s way?

No! It is “*by nature*”, at birth, naturally as we came out of the womb (see Galatians 2:15). That beautiful bundle of flesh over which we rejoice at birth is actually a ‘child of wrath’, liable to punishment from the beginning of its existence. Consider Psalm 51:5, 58:3, Romans 5:12 that God’s wrath is the result of Adam’s one act of disobedience. Think about it: If death is the wages of sin then why do little children die (see Romans 5:13-14)? When Adam fell and was condemned, the whole human race fell in and with him, and all are born guilty. Any child born into a royal family is automatically a royal person. We do not become sinners because we make a practice of sin; but we are born sinners by nature, and so are under God’s wrath. Contrary to what so many think today, children are not born innocent and then shaped by their environment. The best education and good governance will never produce a super human race, otherwise graduates and citizens from democracies would be the most moral persons.

### **(3) Towards Whom Does God Have This Attitude?**

- First, Paul writes “*we*”, so especially including Jews, the very people God had chosen. Do not think that such condemnation before God is only true of pagan idolaters who bow down to wood and stone, and who practice unmentionable wicked deeds, such as the Canaanites. It is true of the very Jews who had all the privileges of the law, the covenant, the promises and the temple. At best they were only outwardly righteous; in reality they were hypocrites and full of pride. If there is anything that calls down the wrath of God it is false religion.
- Second, Paul includes “*the rest of mankind*”, so especially including Gentiles. None are left out, all are included, wherever and whenever (Romans 3:9,23). This attitude of wrath is how God looks upon the whole human race, all descended from Adam. We may be proud of our development, and there is much for which to be thankful. But God sees the ways that such development is use for increasing sin – use of our new roads, alcohol and miraa become more accessible, new resources are used for self-aggrandizement.

Why is it so necessary to understand these things?

1. It shows up the many false philosophies of this world. Children are not innocent, basically good and improving. The environment does not make all the difference. Universal education and a better constitution will not solve all problems. Salvation by works is impossible.
2. Until you have some understanding you will not put all your trust in Jesus Christ as you will not see your helplessness and great need. It is as if you just have a headache and you only need a few panadol of religion. But your need is so great because you are spiritually dead, not free but a slave, and under God’s condemnation.
3. Only then will you begin to see the wonder of God’s love in Christ, why the Son of God had to come and die if there was to be any hope of salvation, for God’s wrath is what we deserve. One had to come, born of woman, to live the life of perfect obedience which we cannot, and to die in our place for our sins. So Paul moves on in v. 4 to “But God...!”.

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## EPHESIANS 2:4-7

### SALVATION (1)

Ephesians 2:3 ended with the final verdict of the Court, judgement was pronounced! Imagine the groans, sobs and look of hopelessness as the prisoner is led away under heavy security. What if this was God's final word, that as "children of wrath" we were to be condemned to punishment we totally deserve? We are dead in sin, in bondage to the world, the devil and the flesh, and under God's wrath, so totally without hope. Only one thing could yet be done, to cry out to the judge, 'Have mercy on me!' But the responsibility of the judge is not to show mercy but to administer justice. So thank God for the next words, "But God,...", so that judgement is not His final word. He has more to say! The student is before the Principal; the irrefutable email evidence is that he has planned to burn down the school. Only one thing remains, to hear the verdict of expulsion. Yet he hears the word, 'But'. There may be hope. For us, it is God Himself who made a way out of our totally hopeless situation.

#### 1. SALVATION IS A REALITY! "you have been saved" (2:5)

A baby is 'saved' by being pulled out of the rubble from an earthquake. For this child salvation means rescue from certain death by exposure. For us salvation means rescue from spiritual death by being given spiritual life. We are rescued from the tyranny of the world, the flesh and the devil, and we are set free to serve God. The sentence of condemnation is cancelled and we are reconciled to God.

What does this look like in practice? Think of Peter who was drowning (Matthew 14:30). Jesus saved him by taking his hand and bringing him into the boat. So if you are saved there are two obvious things that are now different about you.

- You are no longer in sin, just as Peter was no longer in the water. Sin has become your greatest enemy, whether in the form of religious pride, hypocrisy, or of outward wickedness, evil speaking, even secret thoughts. Saul the proud, persecuting Pharisee came to have no trust in himself.
- You are now in Christ, just as Peter was in the safety of the boat with Jesus. The Lord is your greatest Friend, the One you praise, pray to, talk about, and serve, because He loved you and died for you. Saul once blasphemed Him, but Christ and His cross came to be the one important thing (Galatians 6:14).

Many people think it is presumptuous to claim to have salvation now. They dare not claim assurance because they think they might fail before the judgement day arrives. This attitude reveals a total misunderstanding of Biblical salvation. Salvation is something given in the past, and it effects continue. Paul used the Greek perfect tense to emphasize that salvation is complete and continues. The Ephesian Christians were already saved as Paul wrote. While our experience of *full* salvation is yet to be experienced, it is guaranteed (see 1 Peter 1:4-5). We do have the first great instalment. Strive until you can humbly profess, 'I have been saved'. You do not have to conform to the world, you do not have to be controlled by sin within; you do not have to be deceived by the devil; you do not have to doubt that you will be acquitted at the Day of Judgement.

## 2. SALVATION IS FROM GOD ALONE “but God...” (2:4)

The baby saved from the rubble was helpless. It was only because men and mighty machines came to the rescue. Nothing could be clearer: there is absolutely no place for anything in man in salvation, whether good works, prayers, kind intentions, even faith and repentance. God does not wait for us; it is not that we cooperate with God. Here is the evidence, from the –

- description of the helpless condition of all men in 2:1-3, as “dead” (see 2:5).
- word “even” (2:5) that shows how desperate is the condition.
- conjunction “but” God (2:4) that emphasizes that there is hope in God alone, that He must save or we cannot be saved.
- emphasis on God’s mercy, love and grace (2:4-5) on which we are dependent, and so not on anything in ourselves.

Let us consider these 3 attributes of God that are the cause of our salvation:

(1) *Mercy*. [“God, being rich in mercy,...”] God looked upon the miserable condition of us sinners and had mercy = took pity. We were in such an awful condition that He must have “rich” mercy, for even the most merciful person in this world would probably stop showing mercy to one so unthankful and rebellious as we have been to God.

(2) *Love*. [“because of the great love with which he loved us,...”] You decide to provide a street child with a home and an education; that is mercy, taking pity. But if it is your own child, we call that love. Note that God’s “great love” is the reason why such rich mercy is shown (“because”). The source of our salvation is His love. God loves because that is His nature (1 John 4:8). It is not because of anything in us, or anything that He foresees we will be in the future, for we are sinners (think about Romans 5:8, 9:11-13, 1 John 4:10). We call this love ‘sovereign’ because God bestows it freely on whoever He wishes. Love wants to bestow every possible blessing (so Ephesians 1:3).

(3) *Grace*. [“by grace you have been saved”] We call such love “grace” because those who receive it do not deserve it; rather they deserve wrath.

If you are saved then you return thanks to God for His mercy, love and grace. It is nothing of yourself. See all these things in the testimony of Paul in 1 Timothy 1:13-16.

## 3. SALVATION IS IN CHRIST ALONE

What is it that God does in His mercy, love and grace? He “made us alive”. We were by nature dead in trespasses, so we must be made spiritually alive. This involves at least 3 aspects:

- our *mind* must be enlightened to receive and understand the things of God, to receive God’s law as good, to accept that sin is what God says it is, that there is a judgement coming, that Christ and His cross are the only way of salvation
- our *feelings* now find these things precious, so that we rejoice in them and trust in them
- our *wills* choose them above everything else; this is nothing less than life from the dead, a total transformation, such as was revealed to Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones (ch. 37)

But this salvation only takes place “together with Christ”. That is, it is impossible without Christ. First, we are with Christ as He represents us, coming into this world to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, living as the second Adam the life that we have failed to live, and dying the death we deserved to die and bearing our punishment (1 Peter 2:24). Second,



we are with Christ as united to Him, as the branch to the vine (John 15:1-5), so that the very life of the Spirit that made Him alive from the dead is powerfully at work in us (so 1:19, Galatians 2:20). This is the great truth for the Christian of the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9).

I want now to press the question upon you. Do you have this salvation? Remember it is nothing less than life from the dead spiritually. Do not reply that you have been saved by baptism and receiving the holy communion, or that you think it is presumptuous to claim salvation, or that you do not know if you are saved or not, and so just leave it there. This is a question of eternal consequence, and you must be sure of the answer or be lost. Students who take exams do everything possible to know their result the soonest. So I ask, are you resting upon God in Christ alone? Upon God's grace alone and nothing in yourself? On Christ and His cross alone? I plead with you to humble yourself because of your unworthiness, and to ask God to save you because He is merciful, loving and gracious. Tell Him that you are putting all your trust in Christ and what He has done.

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## **EPHESIANS 2:4-7**

### **SALVATION (2)**

We are continuing with this great Biblical truth of salvation. It is our prayer that you will truly understand what salvation is according to the Scriptures. It is a common claim today, 'I am saved, Jesus Christ is my personal Saviour'. Yet so often it appears to be no more than words, for many such do not lead very different lives from non-Christians. For others salvation is baptism, or responding in a meeting by repeating 'the sinner's prayer', or by trusting the Lord to help in such earthly needs as sickness and poverty. And yet there is nothing more important than this subject; get this wrong and you are wrong for ever. There are eternal consequences. If at a crossroads you take the wrong route, the only solution is to return and take the right way. According to Ephesians 2:7 salvation can be properly understood when the spotlight is turned on God's **grace**. God has ONE great purpose in His work of salvation, to "show the immeasurable riches of his *grace* in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus". We will now turn on that spotlight so that all else appears in total darkness. The following two things will show with noonday brightness that salvation is by **grace** and nothing else.

#### **1. THE ONES WHO RECEIVE SALVATION**

##### *(1) What are they given?*

They are given blessings far greater and far more than can be imagined! Not just life from spiritual death, but 'raised and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places'. What God has done to His Son by His immeasurable power (1:19-20), He has done also to those who are saved. Our Lord was not raised to continue His earthly ministry, but to begin a new heavenly ministry on our behalf. Don't think of the "heavenly places" as only where Christ is at the right hand of God, because we ourselves are now in those 'heavenly places'. Think of it as 'the kingdom of heaven', the rule of Christ over His people, so that now our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), now we are indwelt by the Spirit from heaven, and now we are

being led towards heaven. For more evidence look up Colossians 2:12, 3:1-4, Romans 6:4-5. We are pictured as “seated” implying the completion of work, rest, so security, and this for ever. It is something that will continue to show the grace of God throughout “the coming ages”. Just as the public showing of a great painting shows the greatness of the painter, so our presence shows that we are a masterpiece of God’s **grace**. And it is all “with Christ” our glorious Saviour and Lord. What more could you wish for? It is true now spiritually, and then in glory in our new resurrection body (Revelation 3:21).

(2) *Who are they?*

You would think anyone to whom such blessings are given must be very special people. But no, there is nothing in them. As with the Corinthians, it was not because they were powerful, or of noble birth, or wise (see 1 Corinthians 1:26ff.). Paul has already clearly written that they deserve no blessing, but only wrath and condemnation.

- They were ‘dead’ – unable to do anything spiritually good, only able to live a life of walking in sin. It is only by the **grace** of God that they are made spiritually alive (2:5).
- They were ‘slaves’ – unable to free themselves, willing slaves of the world, the devil and the flesh. The response of God is His **grace** in setting them free from the world into the “heavenly places”, to sit with Christ where all things are under His feet, including the devil (1:22).

Every need of ours before God is fully answered; nothing is lacking for eternity. We do not contribute anything towards our salvation; we only have things from which we need to be saved. Everything is only “in Christ Jesus”, that is, because of Him and by being united to Him. So if it is not what we deserve, and it is nothing we deserve but what He has done for us, then it is pure **grace**. It is called “kindness” (2:7), as this is grace in action (see 4:32), His giving His Son for us. God deals with us exactly as with His glorious, eternal and sinless Son! We owe Him absolutely everything. To His name be the glory!

## 2. THE ONE WHO GIVES SALVATION

We are seeking to clearly show how true salvation is by “the immeasurable riches of His **grace**”. The largeness of a gift is not simply the amount, but also what it cost the giver. This is why Jesus said that the widow “put in more” than all the rich, for she “put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4). We are going to tread on very holy ground in order to think of these “immeasurable riches”.

(1) *What did it cost the Father?* Everything!

God made the world “very good”. It was spoiled by Satan who tempted and deceived the first couple to disobey God. Why didn’t God just start all over again? That would have been to admit that He had failed, that Satan had been victorious. It is true that Adam and Eve deserved eternal death, but God determined to save a people for Himself and to rescue creation. But sin had to be paid for; God’s justice had to be satisfied. Who would be able to defeat Satan? How will God get a people who will be genuinely obedient to Him? This was God’s answer – ‘I will send my own Son, my only Son, and so my beloved Son’ (see Luke 20:13). On a human level, think of what it cost Abraham to agree to sacrifice his only and beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). We can hardly begin to understand, but the Bible often emphasizes that Jesus is the “only” Son (John 1:14, 3:16,18, 1 John 4:9). There is a relationship of perfect love

and harmony between the Father and the Son (John 15:9, 17:24); Jesus Himself is called “beloved”, that is, specially loved by the Father (Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Ephesians 1:6). Nonetheless, God sent Him forth (Galatians 4:4), gave Him (John 3:16), did not spare Him (Romans 8:32), made Him to be sin and so treated Him as if the foulest sinner (2 Corinthians 5:21), and turned His back from Him when He was dying on the cross. Here is completeness in giving, holding nothing back, because all was necessary for our salvation.

(2) *What did it cost the Son?* Everything!

The Son eternally dwelt in glory with the Father and the Spirit, incessantly adored, and worthy of all praise. Yet He was willing to leave all behind for our sakes, to ‘make Himself nothing’ (= to give up His reputation), and to humble Himself even to death on the cursed cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Think of what it cost Him to just come into this sinful world. If your soul is pained by what you see and hear, what about His sinless soul? Then “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24), and suffered accordingly. This is immeasurable love, and because it is shown to those who are only worthy of condemnation, it is pure **grace**.

### Questions

1. Is your view of salvation one of **grace**? Do you confess that it is the grace of God alone from beginning to end? Throughout eternity the presence of saved sinners in heaven will be the indisputable evidence that God is the God of ‘immeasurably rich **grace**’. This is His purpose and His great glory.
2. Have you been saved by **grace**? Have you consciously rejected anything you have done or promise that you might do? Is your only hope rather in God and what He has done in Christ and Him crucified? I ask you now: ‘Why should God let you enter His holy dwelling?’ What is your answer? ‘I did my best, although I know I am not perfect; I went to church; I read my Bible and prayed’? No! No! Point to the Lamb slain and cast your crown at His feet, for He alone is worthy.
3. Are you constantly glorifying God for His **grace**? Because it is ‘immeasurably rich’ there is no end to its glory. It is the theme of heaven: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10), because God has made them “white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).

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## **EPHESIANS 2:8-9**

### **SALVATION IS OF GOD ALONE!**

Repetition can be used to convey a sense of emphasis and urgency. For example, if a child is reluctant to do what it has been told, then the command may be repeated. Good teachers repeat what is most important, wanting to be sure that the hearers have understood. Under the inspiration of God, Paul is such a good teacher so that what is repeated in his letter to the Ephesian Church is **most** important. Paul continues to hammer home that salvation is of God, but His grace alone.

“We are here face to face with one of the most crucial statements that is to be found anywhere in Scripture” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation*, p. 128). If there is God, and if we are sinners, then there is nothing more important that we receive salvation from sin and be reconciled to God. And we must know how this can be obtained. Because it is so important there are also many counterfeits, many false doctrines, for the devil wants to deceive. As we look carefully at Ephesians 2:8-9 in this article we shall clearly see that salvation is of God, of God alone, something that Paul has been repeating up to this point. God’s sovereign election is involved (1:5); he has repeatedly written that it is “in Christ”; God’s power is needed (1:19); it is denied to the sinner’s ability (2:1-3); it is the result of God’s grace (2:5). We shall reflect on the four reasons given why salvation is of God.

## **1. OF GOD – BECAUSE “BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED”**

The role of God’s grace in salvation has already been emphasized (see 1:6,7, 2:5,7). If something is received as a result of grace, it means it was totally undeserved. More than that, the opposite was deserved. If someone asks you for help, and looking closely you recognize the person who robbed you, you might justly call the police. To show grace would be to give the help requested notwithstanding the evil done. Before God no human being has done anything that can be called truly good; all are sinful in His holy sight (Romans 3:12). In court the accused might plead for leniency, ‘This is my first offence, and I have not broken other laws’. But we have sinned from the beginning; we have repeatedly broken every commandment. As Paul wrote to Timothy about his life in sin before he became a Christian he saw that the only possible cause of salvation was God’s overflowing grace (1 Timothy 1:14). “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). This is completely true of the religious Jew as well as the idolatrous Gentile (Acts 15:11). If you are to be saved it can only be because of God’s grace towards you giving you the total opposite of what you deserve. This is why Christians approach God in humble worship ever amazed at His grace. We sing, ‘Amazing grace’! If you were to rescue your enemy from death you would expect constant and profuse words of amazement and gratitude. And God has rescued us from eternal death in hell.

## **2. OF GOD – BECAUSE “THROUGH FAITH”**

Here there is so much misunderstanding. Some say: ‘Grace is God’s part, faith is our part’. In this way, faith is made something that the sinner does, something presented to God as a reason why God should bestow salvation. Others teach that, instead of the Ten Commandments as a rule for life, in the new covenant God just requires faith. Yet still others declare that God foresees those who will believe and chooses to save them. However, it is very clear that faith and grace go together. Those in Achaia “through grace had believed” (Acts 18:27). Abraham would receive the promised inheritance by “faith, in order that the promise might rest on grace” (Romans 4:16). What did Abraham *do* when he believed? Despite all evidence to the contrary he received as true what God said and lived in expectation of its fulfilment (Romans 4:16-21). In other words, he did not *do* anything; he did not even deserve to receive such wonderful promises.

What then is **faith**? Faith is a unique grace that receives, but gives nothing. Love gives. Note the precise language of “through” faith as an instrumental means. It is never “because of” faith. When a tow truck pulls a lorry out of a ditch, it is the power of the tow-truck’s engine

that is praised, not the strength of the tow rope! It is true that it is the responsibility of every person to exercise faith in the gospel. But faith cannot be exercised unless:

- the message of the gospel is first received, and
- the Lord opens the heart to give heed to the message (Acts 16:14).

It is false to think that because of so-called 'free-will' we can choose to believe anytime we want. Those dead in sin (2:1) are unable to so choose; the will chooses, but always in the direction of sin as a willing slave. You say you are saved? Don't say it is because *you* decided to believe, because *you* responded in a meeting. Ask yourself: Why was it you and not someone else? Apart from God's grace can you really give any reason why you believed?

### **3. OF GOD – BECAUSE “NOT YOUR OWN DOING... NOT A RESULT OF WORKS”**

How the word of God repeats itself to prevent anyone going away with wrong teaching! There has been much discussion as to the precise reference of the word “this” (and *this* is not your own doing). Does it refer specifically to faith, or to the whole preceding phrase? It has often been pointed out, and it is true, that “this” is in the neuter gender, but faith is feminine, and the conclusion has been drawn that “this” cannot therefore refer to faith. So if I say, ‘Sarah is going to town and she is beautiful’, you know the beauty is Sarah’s as the ‘she’ and not the town’s. Yet, the Greek language is different. In Matthew 4:9 “all these” is neuter, but refers back to the kingdoms and their glory (v. 8) which are feminine! In conclusion, the gender difference is not a sufficient reason why “this” cannot refer to faith. Two arguments can be put forward for “this” referring to faith: faith is the nearest antecedent, and there is no doubt that faith is a gift of God (v. 9, Philippians 1:29, cf. Acts 18:27).

Actually it makes no difference whether “this” refers specifically to faith or the whole of verse 8. Either way faith is included as not something coming naturally out of the sinner. It is “not your own doing”. It is “not the result of works”. Never look on faith as something that you yourself produced, making you different from others who have no faith. Faith is not a work bringing salvation as a reward; for works are the result of salvation through faith (see verse 10). So whether works are the Jewish works of the law, or any human performance whatever, they have nothing to do with salvation (see Philippians 3:4-6, Romans 9:11,16, 11:5-6). No matter how hard you try to be good and to avoid sin, and no matter how much you multiply religious ceremonies, there is no work you can do, there is no pile of works you can accumulate that can in any way contribute to your salvation. This is confirmed by the conclusion, “so that no one may boast”. In salvation there is no room for boasting. If you have done something others have not done then it is possible to congratulate yourself (see also Romans 4:2). But if you have done nothing to earn salvation because you are as unworthy as everyone else, then you receive salvation not because of anything in you.

### **4. OF GOD – BECAUSE “IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD”**

Finally, that salvation is of God, is again put positively. Here is the fourth nail in the coffin to kill for ever that idea that salvation is in any way due to what you do, even the exercise of faith. It is God’s “gift”, not something owed to you by what you have performed (Romans 4:4). God has given us faith unto salvation by first graciously bringing the message of salvation to us, and then by giving a new heart, which includes opening our spiritual eyes to see and

desire that message of salvation. When a beggar is given something it is ridiculous to think that he might congratulate himself! Do we need to go on and on? Surely salvation is of God, and God alone.

So why is this important? This very point was the great controversy that threatened to divide the apostolic church (Acts 15). It is the substance of the letters to the Roman and Galatians Churches. Everywhere there was but one conclusion – if salvation is of works in any way, then it is another gospel (so Galatians 1:6-9), and those who follow it are accursed. If you come to God like the Pharisee in the parable of Luke 18:9-14 you will never be justified. You must come like the tax collector with nothing worthy. “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling”.

How can you be sure you have come to God depending only upon Christ? Are you always thanking God that He gave you salvation, asking why He chose you one so unworthy? Are you always praising God for giving you His Son, knowing it is the only way you can come to God and be accepted?

How can you obtain this salvation? Receive the invitation God has given you in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are newly employed as the lowliest cleaner in a great company employing thousands. You receive a written invitation from the manager to go to his house in the evening for supper. If, when the door is opened, you are asked why you have come to the manager’s home with the sneer, ‘Don’t you know who you are!’, you will humbly and even tremblingly reply, ‘It is because I was invited, and here is the invitation’. At that you will be welcomed as readily as the most distinguished guest. Do you have a good reason for refusing this gift of salvation even now? You know you need it. It is free, for it is a gift, and of God’s grace. Hold out the empty hand of faith. It is ALL of God so that if you ask Him in humility He will give it to you.

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## **EPHESIANS 2:10**

### **THE GOOD WORKS OF A CHRISTIAN**

Having reached this point in the letter we should all be convinced that **works** of any kind can contribute nothing whatsoever to salvation. Rather, salvation is of God’s grace, in Christ, and through faith alone. But such is the deceitfulness of sin, there may be one of at least two wrong conclusions drawn from this:

- Works for a Christian do not really matter. This conclusion may be made because, after all it may be reasoned, ‘It is faith and not works that saves me. If I have no works but I become a Christian, then works do not really matter.’ From Ephesians 2:10 we shall see that this is fundamentally wrong.
- Works for a Christian contribute to final salvation. It is reasoned, ‘Such works are called good, God is pleased with them, and I cannot enter into heaven without them. Judgement is according to works’ (Romans 2:6). Although no one will enter heaven without good works, to believe that such good works, together with the saving work of Christ, are my ticket into heaven, is another gospel! Similarly, it is false to claims that some Christians have so many good works (called works of ‘super-erogation’) that they have a surplus of merits that may be

given to other Christians to build up their merits (as in Roman Catholicism). This is why Paul adds 2:10 to make sure that there is no reliance on good works as a basis for any part of salvation.

## **1. THE UNSAVED ARE UNABLE TO DO GOOD WORKS**

Paul has used the language of resurrection from the dead to describe what happens when a person becomes a Christian (vv. 5-6). Now he uses the language of creation. A Christian is one who is “created in Christ Jesus”, God’s “workmanship”. Think of a potter working with clay to make a pot. Here is the most beautiful clay pot, perfectly rounded, properly hardened, exactly fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. Once it was just an unformed mass of clay in the ground much to the annoyance of the person whose foot got stuck in it! What part did the clay have in it being brought from the ground and made into such a pot? Obviously none. God is the potter (Romans 9:21, Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:6), and He has made us what we are. By definition, the creation cannot create itself. “Created” is a very strong word, implying out of nothing like the original creation (Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:11) – if Christ made everything, then there were no materials at the beginning that he used. The Christian is not a renovation, an improvement of the old, but like someone totally new, a new man (2:15, 4:24), a new-born baby (John 3:3,5), “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God is not passive waiting for the clay (the sinner) to form itself, to pray, to believe; He is pro-active. How may you know that God has created you a Christian? You become aware that you are new, you are different, because you have new thoughts and desires, a new strength that you did not create.

The clear implication of this is that before you were created in Christ you were totally unable to do anything good before God. However, the unsaved are very active, walking in trespasses and sins (2:1-2), busy serving not God but the world, the devil and the flesh (2:2-3). As far as God is concerned not one thing done is good before Him (Romans 3:12). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). This is so humbling. Paul once thought he had loads of good works before God but on becoming a Christian he saw them as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). As with Paul, nothing was more detestable to God than the supposed good works of the Pharisees done in self-confidence and pride (see Luke 18:12). It would be like looking at a most beautiful leather bound book only to open it up and find that it is torn and mildewed, only fit to be thrown out. The unsaved do not love God, they have no true faith, they want to please themselves, and they will not submit to God’s commands just because they are God’s (Romans 8:7-8). How can such a person be changed? Nothing less than God’s mighty creative work is needed (see 1:19). This is impossible without Christ.

## **2. GOOD WORKS ARE THE FRUIT OF SALVATION**

Although “good works” have nothing to do with being saved (see 2:8), they have everything to do with the life of one who has been saved. They are not the root, but they are the fruit. God creates us in Christ Jesus for one great reason, “for (the purpose of doing) good works”. When God comes to us in salvation He finds no fruit on our tree, so He graciously saves us through faith in Christ. But He saves us in order that we might start producing this fruit on the tree of

our life. Please note that these good works are produced by God so that we cannot take any credit for them. There are the following lines of evidence:

- ★ The connective “for” at the beginning of verse 10 connects it with the previous sentence. The emphasis that salvation is not by works (vv. 8-9), so that there is no possibility of boasting, is proved by the fact that Christians are the creation of God.
- ★ The first word in the sentence is “His”. The emphasis is on the fact that we are *His* workmanship, and not our own or anyone else’s.
- ★ The created thing is totally dependent upon its Creator. If your TV gives such good quality pictures and sound you do not praise the TV but the brand name, i.e. the manufacturer.

But good works are **necessary** as the evidence or fruit of salvation. What if the TV does not work? Then there is something very wrong with it; you may even have to get a new one. Sometimes it is objected that if salvation is by grace then we may sin and it does not matter, we need not be so cautious about sin (this is the objection imagined in Romans 6:1). The truth is that anyone who is not really interested in good works as the purpose of the Christian life has never experienced the new creation in Christ Jesus.

*As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me (John 15:4).*

*faith working through love (Galatians 5:6),... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,... (5:22).*

*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17).*

When God found you, you were walking in trespasses and sins. He saved you so that you might walk in good works, a totally different life. This what we call repentance and conversion. The evidence that you are a Christian is that you are now concerned about good works as a priority. “Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Remember that God chooses us to be saved “that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (1:4). If this describes you, then you want to know exactly what these good works are so that you can do them.

### **3. GOD ENABLES GOOD WORKS TO BE DONE**

There is much emphasis on good works in the New Testament. Consider the following.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your *good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

There was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, ... She was full of *good works* and acts of charity (Acts 9:36).

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, ... you may abound in every *good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

... so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every *good work* (Colossians 1:10).

... but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with *good works* (1 Timothy 2:10).



Let a widow be enrolled ... having a reputation for *good works*: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every *good work* (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

As for the rich in this present age, ... They are to do good, to be rich in *good works*, to be generous and ready to share, ... (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable ... that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every *good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of *good works*, ... (Titus 2:7).

Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for *good works* (Titus 2:13-14).

Remind them ... to be ready for every *good work*, ... (Titus 3:1)

I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to *good works* (Titus 3:8).

And let our people learn to devote themselves to *good works*, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and *good works*, ... (Hebrews 10:24).

What are these good works? They are the opposite of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Very simply stated, good works are whatever works God has commanded us to do. They are good because it is God Himself who has commanded them. So there are three things that make our works good:

- ✓ They are works that God has commanded us in the Scriptures to do.
- ✓ We perform them willingly and joyfully from the heart just because God has commanded.
- ✓ We do them for God's glory and not to earn salvation. Then it is a 'good' work.

For example, you come to a prayer meeting. You have read that this is what the apostolic church did (Acts 2:42) and you know this is an example given by God to follow. You do not find it a burden but a delight, although you might be tired, and you have to push other important things out of the way. You do not attend in order to be seen by others but to commune with your God.

Such good works cover the whole of life, both our outer actions and our inner thoughts. We are to glorify God in our bodies in all that we do, even in our eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). In every step of life that we take there are two possible ways forward. We either walk in the path of good works, or in the path of trespasses and sins. Thank God that the way is clearly marked before us. It is the way God has "prepared beforehand". The light of His word shines on that way directing us to walk along it. In other words, God has already built the road that leads to glory. We are not trail blazers but followers. All that is revealed in the Bible, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, is the way (see Ephesians 4 – 6 for example). Perhaps you say that it is so hard to do good works, my life is so busy, and there is so much opposition. Actually His yoke is easy and His burden is light; He has given you His Holy Spirit. And it is precisely in your busy life where you are to do good works. It is in these good works that you will show that you are different from the world. Your light is to shine in the darkness.

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## EPHESIANS 2:11-13

### HOW TO COME NEAR TO GOD

Most people just assume that God is near them to bless them. Everywhere people are praying to God, crying out to Him in their need. Even those who do not make a specific profession of religion pray. In today's pluralistic world it is so often said, 'We all worship one God' and 'All roads lead to God, to heaven', as if God will hear any prayer no matter what. You are free to believe this if you want to, but it is not the teaching of the Bible.

It is very clear that before becoming Christians the Gentiles of Paul's day were "far" from God (see 2:13,17). It is specifically such Gentiles that Paul is addressing, Christians who were not Jews by blood, who formed the majority of Christians in Ephesus. As he blesses God for the common salvation (1:10) he also reflects on the great obstacles to their unity in Christ. It was perhaps the greatest problem in the early church. Did Gentiles need to be circumcised to be saved was the question discussed and settled in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's letter to the Galatian Churches was written to combat the false teaching that keeping the law, including circumcision was necessary for justification. The typical Jewish attitude towards Gentiles is seen in the following quotation:

Every day the Jew thanked God he was not born a Gentile.

The Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell... God loves only Israel of all the nations He had made... It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world... If a Jew married a Gentile the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out.

Let us remember that we are almost all Gentiles by birth, so we are in the same condition that these Gentiles were.

#### 1. WE ARE NOT NEAR TO GOD BY BIRTH (2:11-12)

It was a privilege to be born a Jew in Old Testament times. God had revealed Himself to them alone (Psalm 147:19-20, Romans 3:1-2). In that word it was said, "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises... the patriarchs, and from their race... is the Christ" (Romans 9:4-5). The Gentiles were excluded because they knew nothing of these things. Yet these privileges did not automatically bring saving blessings to every Jew. There had to be the working of the Spirit in the heart (see Romans 2:28-29). These privileges pointed towards real spiritual blessings which none of us have today by birth.

(1) *We were not circumcised.* God commanded all the male offspring of Abraham to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). This was not the African circumcision at puberty, but when the son was only 8 days old, done in obedience to God. So Gentiles were contemptuously called the "uncircumcision" by Jews, being no better than dogs. Before Christ came such circumcision was the mark of being in covenant relationship with God. But Paul also spoke to Jews who merely boasted in this mark in the flesh as if it guaranteed all spiritual blessing by

itself! He reminds them that it is only “made in the flesh by (human) hands”, a sign of the need for heart circumcision or regeneration (see Romans 2:28-29) in order to keep the law (Romans 2:25-27). God does not look upon marks on the body, but upon the heart. If there is no new, circumcised heart, then you are not in the kingdom. Remember what Nicodemus was told, that without the new birth he was outside, he could not see or enter the kingdom (John 3:3,5). There is the children’s story of a goat that wanted to become a lion. It tried having a sign declaring ‘lion’, roaring, eating and walking like a lion. Obviously, the only way to become a lion was to be born a lion. We are born far from God and His people, and there must be radical ‘heart surgery’ if we may come near to God.

(2) *We had no right to any saving blessings from God.* We need to be initiated, for we are not ‘insiders’. Five things are listed as totally lacking in those not near to God.

- Christless – “separated from Christ” or from “the Christ” the Messiah. He had not been revealed to these Gentiles. Those who have never heard the word of God know nothing about a promised Saviour. Even today, 2,000 years on, there are those who have never heard so that they have no true remedy for their sins. They have had religious ceremonies, animal and even human sacrifices, good works, self-denial, but what can these accomplish? But you who read this, you have heard, you have this great privilege (as the Jews, Romans 3:2), but it will do you no good unless you believe.
- Stateless – “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel”, aliens amongst God’s people. If you are not a citizen of the country in which you are living you cannot partake of the peculiar rights and privileges of such citizens, such as voting. In the Old Testament God had chosen Israel as His people and the Gentiles were not part of them. Today that Israel is the church (see 1 Peter 2:9-10). You are not born a member of Christ’s church, so you are treated as an alien, outside the community. This is why the Lord’s Supper should only be for those who have the evidence that they belong to the community of God’s people.
- Promise-less – “strangers to the covenants of promise”. The great covenant promise is ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’. It was first given to Abraham, then repeated to Isaac and Jacob, and then to the nation at Sinai. It is the great blessing in heaven (Revelation 21:3). The promise is only to those who are in the covenant, who are part of God’s covenant people, i.e. not to Philistines and the like. Life depends upon promises made, teaching in school, wages from work, government policies. God is a God of promise, and the life of faith depends upon the promises He makes (Hebrews 6:12, see Ephesians 1:13).
- Hopeless – “having no hope”, because of having no promise, especially of the Messiah. There is no life without hope, but this hope is much more than a wish, for it must have a secure foundation. The great hope in the Bible is the resurrection from the dead of all of God’s people to eternal life (see Acts 23:6, 24:15, 26:6-8), because of the resurrection of Jesus. The world of Paul’s day had no such hope. For them death ended all togetherness as seen in the many inscriptions on tombs bidding an eternal farewell. Do you have a firm and clear hope that steers you through life as you await that coming Day?
- Godless – “without God in the world”. The Gentiles had many so-called ‘gods’ (see Acts 17:23, 1 Corinthians 8:5). Yet they were without God as not near the true and only God. No other ‘god’ exists, as the Baalists found out (1 Kings 18). In their extremity even the wicked can call out to God, but how terrible when there is no answer! They have no God to befriend, to bless, to guide or to save them, all things that God does for His people (as

in Psalm 23). There is only ONE God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reject Him and you have no god. This is how the Bible evaluates all non-Christian religion – as “without God”.

## **2. WE ARE BROUGHT NEAR BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST (2:13)**

The language of “far off” and “near” is from the Old Testament (Isaiah 57:19, see Acts 2:39, 22:21). The Gentiles lived far away from the temple in Jerusalem where God manifested His presence. So how did Gentiles in Ephesus come near to God? Not by going to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, not by becoming Jews by submitting to circumcision, but in the very same way by which Jews themselves became Christians.

- ★ By a divine initiative, not something that we work out for ourselves. He brings us by what He has done.
- ★ Not by the sacrifice of an animal, but by the blood of Christ the Son of God (1:7, Hebrews 9:12-14, 10:19, 1 Peter. 1:19, 1 John 1:7).
- ★ By being “in Christ Jesus” by faith, united to Him, and so receiving all the blessings that are in Him.

This is the **only** way to be near to God. You either come to God as you put all your trust in the cross of Christ, or you cannot come. Consider what is already proclaimed in heaven, that it is by the blood of the Lamb of God that sinners have been ransomed for God (Revelation 5:9). In Old Testament times Gentiles could not enter the tabernacle because they did not belong to the people of God. Lepers had to stay outside the camp, but if cleansed and blood was sprinkled then they could come (Leviticus 14). Israelites themselves could only come with a bloody offering for the forgiveness of their sins. Even priests had to have blood shed for themselves in order to ‘draw near’. The very high priest could not come without blood (Hebrews 9:22). It is through the blood of Christ that the new covenant is established, as we remember in the Lord’s Supper. So as we come to God we sing, “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling”. Let us remember this so that we constantly give thanks that by grace we now have Christ, that we are numbered among God’s people, that we are in secure covenant relationship with God, that we have great hope, and that God is ours, through the blood of Christ. Let us build our Christian life on this and this alone.

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## **EPHESIANS 2:14-16**

### **PEACE WITH GOD AND MAN**

Peace is one thing the world is desperately looking for. It is what various international organizations are seeking to establish. For example, there is the United Nations, there are Truth and Justice Commissions, there is an emphasis on education for all and on economic development. But have these things been able to bring genuine peace? The answer is in the daily news headlines. In this quest the Church is not seen as a key player. Why should it when its own strife and divisions show up its hypocrisy? Yet true and lasting peace is only found in Christianity, in Christ Himself.

Paul's readers of this letter are mostly Gentiles who have become Christians, and so he begins to address them (2:11). Before, they were far from God (2:12), but now they have been brought near just like the Christians from a Jewish background (2:13). In the following verses (2:14-18) Paul explains exactly *how* Christ has done this, using the words 'peace' and 'reconciliation'. Being "brought near" is to be at peace with God, reconciled to Him. That Christians from both a Jewish and Gentile background now have the same blessings in Christ means that such are reconciled to each other.

## **1. CHRIST IS OUR PEACE (2:14)**

The opening words of verse 14 are like a title – "For He Himself is our peace, ..." Peace is identified with Him. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). To bring peace is why He came (Luke 2:14). His kingdom is one of peace (Romans 14:17). When you think about Christ one thing that must come to mind is 'peace'. Parents might say of their child, 'you are our joy'. We know they mean that the child brings them so much joy.

The emphasis here is on peace between hostile people. The Jews despised the rest of mankind as uncircumcised, as unclean like the dogs that scavenge through the rubbish heaps. They were so proud thinking that they alone were God's favourites. In return Jews have been hated as 'enemies of the human race' (see Acts 16:20). You only have to consider the Holocaust. Such hostility remains as a mark of humanity. It is everywhere you turn. You must belong to the 'right' group of people. We were shocked and ashamed to see it so blatant in the post-election clashes of 2008 in Kenya, and at best it remains hidden in very many hearts only needing a spark for it to be fanned into flame. Christ has come to replace such hostility with genuine peace, where mutual respect and love for persons as they are. Although in this life it will never be perfect, it is true peace! In the church we have known a measure of it. I remember when first coming to Kenya as a young man being met by six Christians who were total strangers to me. But when we had each testified to our faith in Christ, despite all our differences of colour, age, education, possessions, language, we had wonderful peace in our relationship. Imagine the former bigoted Pharisee Paul, having uncircumcised Titus as his travelling companion!

## **2. HOW IS CHRIST OUR PEACE? (2:14-15a)**

Paul continues to write three things that Christ has done to establish such peace.

(1) "*He has made us both one*". This is the result of what Christ has done and it is put first with the way it was done following. "Both" in the context refers to Gentile and Jewish believers. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). They are not Jews or Gentiles any more as to what describes them, but they are those "in Christ Jesus". Earthly distinctions no longer describe us. We are Christians first of all.

(2) He "*has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility*". There was a 'wall' which divided the Jew from the Gentile. In the Jewish temple there was a literal wall beyond which Gentiles could not go upon pain of death. There was a wall in Europe named the 'Iron Curtain' that divided the East from the West. But Paul is here referring to an invisible wall that consists of "commandments and ordinances". The purpose of the law given at Sinai, in what we know

as the Old or Mosaic Covenant, was to keep the Jews separate from all others. They were a people who were holy to the Lord, belonging to Him, to serve Him, and not do what the rest of the nations did (see Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2,21, 26:19-20). In this way Israel was to be kept separate until the coming of Christ. Look at how Paul teaches about the law in his letter to the Galatians. The law was like a prison (3:23). The law was a guardian (3:24), so that the Jews were like slaves (4:1-2). Christ has broken down this wall “in His flesh”. His flesh is a reference to His body in His death (see Colossians 1:22). He fulfilled this law, that we have broken, on our behalf by bearing its curse in His body on the tree (Galatians 3:13),

(3) *“by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances”*. In this way Christ has ‘abolished’ the law. We must ask, in what sense is the law abolished? Certainly Jerusalem as the city of God on earth, the temple as God’s earthly dwelling place, the priests of the order of Levi, the animal sacrifices, the festival days, the food distinctions, are all done away with and are no more. Yet this very letter reinforces the 5<sup>th</sup>. Commandment (6:2). Our Lord Himself reinterprets the moral laws with greater strictness, declaring that He has not come to abolish but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17-48). It is as a covenant, summarized in the Ten Commandments written on stone, that it is abolished. In the new covenant the law is now written upon the heart, for both Jew and Gentile believer.

### **3. WHAT CHRIST ACCOMPLISHES AS OUR PEACE (2:15b-16)**

With the word “that” indicating purpose, Paul now explains what Christ has accomplished.

(1) *“that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ...”*. Paul goes further than saying that Jew and Gentile are united in Christ. Now there is just “one new man”, no longer Jew or Gentile, but a Christian. Gentiles do not become Jews, nor Jews Gentiles, but both become Christians. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is therefore finished. Christians, the people of God, the church, are not a mixture of the two, half Jew and half Gentile, but wholly different from both. How does Christ bring this peace? By making any person a new creation, with a new heart, united “in Himself” by faith. It is His sovereign work that guarantees success.

(2) *“and (that) He might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility”*.

- Reconciliation to God. This is the second reason why Christ broke down the wall of hostility. Four questions may be asked:
  - i) Do we need reconciliation with God? Yes, because the Bible clearly teaches it in Romans 5:10-11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, here, and Colossians 1:21. There is a problem between God and man that needs to be solved.
  - ii) Who needs to be reconciled, man or God or both? Both are needed. Man has a problem with God. He does not want to submit to Him, but wants to go his own way. God has a problem with man, for he has broken His commandments, and is under His wrath (2:3). Don’t hide behind what many say that ‘God loves you’ as if God is OK with you. God’s anger needs to be turned away – this is what is meant by the word propitiate as in Romans 3:25 and 5:10. Even if you can change your own attitude towards God, how will you change God’s attitude towards you? This is the greatest problem.
  - iii) Which reconciliation comes first, with man or with God? We must first be reconciled to God, then we can be reconciled to each other. This is because you must first be made

a new man. When God changes you then your attitude towards others is changed. For example, the most powerful motive to forgive others is that God has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

iv) How can we be reconciled to God? This is what Paul goes on to explain.

- Reconciliation to God through the cross. This is the most wonderful thing about reconciliation. We are the problem, but God provides the solution in His Son. And it is “through the cross” which is why the cross is the centrepiece of Christianity. A cross was a most cruel instrument of punishment, and in the Old Testament one whose body was hung up on a tree was one cursed of God. Before an animal was sacrificed the hands of the sinner were placed on its head symbolizing the transfer of guilt so that the animal was to die in the place of the sinner (for example, Leviticus 1:4). Jesus died on the cross in our place. Our sins were laid upon Him. He experienced the wrath of God that we deserved in those three hours of darkness, when He cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). With sin removed, nothing separated us from God, so there is reconciliation. Go back to the temple. In the ark, in the Holy of Holies that represents God’s presence amongst His people, there is the Law, the Ten Commandments. Those commandments have been broken times without number and they cry out for vengeance from God. The High Priest, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), enters the Holy of Holies with the blood of sacrifice and sprinkles it on the mercy seat, which is the lid of the ark. We may say that as God looks down at His broken law He now sees the blood that covers that sin so that His wrath is now turned away. So the “hostility”, here between God and man, is “killed”.

There is no other way you can come to God and be reconciled to Him. Imagine the Day of Judgement has come, and you are before God. Of course you want to enter heaven, but you are told you cannot because it is pointed out that you are not holy as God is holy. You know it is true, that you fall far short of the glory of God. What argument will you bring? ‘Lord, I have tried hard, although I know I am not perfect’? ‘At least I have not done many of the wicked things that others have done’? ‘Every Sunday I am at worship, every day I pray, and I am very careful in my tithing’? No! No! You must point to Christ at the right hand of God, and say, ‘He shed His precious blood for me, to pay the debt I owe you because of my sin, and in His name and by His merits have mercy on me’. Don’t wait until that Day when it will be too late. Now is the day of salvation. Call upon Christ now.

- Reconciliation of “us both”. Here it is Jew and Gentile who have become Christians. But it includes whatever worldly divisions there may be based on race, sex, age, and so on. We are “one body”, a “new man”. In other words, the way of reconciliation is the same for all, for Paul the strict Pharisee who had laboured so hard to keep God’s law, for the Prodigal Son who had abandoned himself to evil, for the dying criminal, and for Cornelius the devout Roman soldier. Why? Because we are all sinners (Romans 3:22b-23). There is only one type of Christian, those who were once sinners, and who have now been saved by grace in Christ. That is why we are united.

Do you see how important the local church is? Christians are more than individuals who have been saved. We are “one new man”, we are “one body”. We are God’s alternative, visible society, of which **peace** is a great characteristic. Read Mark 9:50, Romans 12:18, 14:19, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:13, 2 Timothy 2:22, Hebrews 12:14,

James 3:18. This is the power of the gospel, bringing peace and reconciliation between God and man, and between man and man, what nothing else can do.

What someone was like before they became a Christian is irrelevant. Cease to think of other Christians in terms of natural birth, level of education, ability, or whatever differences there may be, as this only brings division. There were parents who wanted to know from their daughter from where the man she wanted to marry came. She answered, 'I do not know where he came from, but I know where he is going!' We must train ourselves to think in this new way. We are a different, a new society (consider Mark 10:42-45). The early church had its own struggles. There was a division between widows who were Hellenists and those who were Jews (Acts 6:1). Barnabas favoured John Mark, perhaps because they were relatives (Acts 15:37). Peter withdrew from eating with certain Christians because they were Gentiles (Galatians 2:12). James decries the partiality shown to the rich in the assemblies of God's people (Jas. 2:2-4). May God grant that our churches forsake such divisions and be assemblies of peace, for the glory of God.

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## **EPHESIANS 2:17-18**

### **THE MEANS AND RESULT OF RECONCILIATION**

Paul continues to write about the wonderful reconciliation between God and sinners and, as a consequence, between Jewish and Gentile sinners who believe. He has made it clear that it is through Christ. Now the question arises, 'How do we get to experience that reconciliation in our own lives?' And once again the answer is centred in Christ, the preaching of Christ. The cross as an historical event does not automatically reconcile. It must be preached. This Paul's burden as he writes to the Corinthians Church. He refers to his preaching as "the word of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). He preaches "Christ crucified" (verse 23). Indeed, that was the sum and substance of his message: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

#### **1. RECONCILIATION IS THROUGH PREACHING (2:17)**

(1) **Who is hearing?** *"You who were far off ... those who were near"*

The language of 'far off' has already been used (verse 13) to refer to Gentiles (they are the subject of these verses, see verse 11). They are 'far off' because they live outside Israel and Jerusalem where God's temple was situated. "Far off" and "near" is a reference to Gentile and Jew respectively, and so to *all* the people of the world. The message is preached to everyone irrespective of who they are. As Jesus commanded, "... that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

(2) **Who is preaching?** *"He came and preached"*

The amazing thing is that Christ Himself is the preacher! We know that He spent three years preaching, but when did He go to cities such as Ephesus to whom this letter is written? Note well what Jesus said when He sent out the seventy-two: "The one who hears you hear Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). He repeated this when He sent out the twelve (Matthew 10:40) and



when He talked with them about their mission once He returns to His Father (John 13:20). The one sent by Christ with a message from Him is to be received as if Christ Himself is the speaker. He has all the authority of Christ. For example, King Ahasuerus made a decree and proclaimed it in every province his kingdom (Esther 3:12-15). Of course he did not proclaim it personally, but the satraps, governors, and officials did. What they said in the name of the king, as they read the decree, came with all the authority of the king. To refuse it was to refuse the king himself. So when you hear a true preacher, one like Paul who came to Ephesus, one sent by Christ, then you are hearing Christ.

Paul possibly states the same truth in that series of questions about how a person can be saved. "And how are they to believe Him whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14). [See the footnote of the ESV for this translation.] He repeats it in his conclusion: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (verse 17). This is not the word about Christ, true as that is, but the word spoken by Christ, through His appointed servants.

What an honourable work the preacher has. What an awesome responsibility to declare only what Christ has appointed him to say. What a blessing to hear Christ speak. No doubt you have heard many preachers and have read many words like the ones before you now, and perhaps to date you have not received the message into your heart. Just think of the day of judgement when the Lord will tell you that you refused to put your trust in Him and the message of His cross. If you were to reply, 'Lord if only *you* yourself in person had spoken to me I would have believed.' Do you know what he will respond? 'I did speak to you through the preachers that I sent to you!' The truth is that if you will not hear the words that are before you on this page, then you would not hear Him were He to speak to you personally, for they would be the very same words.

### (3) What is the message? "*Peace*"

The message is not about economic development, or personal success in this world, or long life. You may be the richest and most successful person and yet not have peace. Imagine a man who has the most luxurious home and every possession one could wish for, yet there is no peace in that home. Better to have poverty with peace, than riches without peace (so says Proverbs 17:1). Good relationships with others are so important, and above all with God. It is peace with God through Jesus Christ that is the greatest blessing. In the name of God this peace is proclaimed to you as you read this. If you will put your faith in Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God then you will "have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). More than that, you will have peace in your own heart: "... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the *peace* of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). Further, you will have peace with others (verse 15). Do not refuse the only way to knowing this fullness of peace, through receiving the message of the gospel that you read in the Bible as explained in Grace & Truth.

## **2. RECONCILIATION IS ACCESS TO GOD (2:18)**

Christ died to reconcile us to God. What is the purpose of this reconciliation? What does reconciliation enable us to do in relation to God, that we cannot do if we are not reconciled? Think of a person who has fallen out with another so they are no longer friends. They no longer enjoy each other's company, and so cannot be a blessing to each other. The highest privilege is to come into the presence of God and to worship Him. But if you are not reconciled to Him, then you are not accepted, and nothing you bring to Him is acceptable. "The sacrifice

of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him" (Proverbs 15:8).

It is possible that the words of verse 18, introduced by "for", are the content of the preaching and an expansion on the word 'peace'. This is the high point of being a Christian.

(1) "We both have access ... to the Father"

We always count freedom of 'access' a great blessing. We talk of access to credit so that we can have what we want; and access to some important person so we can get favour when we need it. We have access to GOD! This is the most incredible privilege. Though unworthy sinners we can actually come into God's most holy presence. Although Esther was queen she could not come into the king's presence unless invited by him (Esther 4:11). With God we have an open-ended invitation, at any time, in any circumstance. Many people are deceived into thinking that just because they are human beings they can come to God and be accepted. How little such people understand God's terrible holiness as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Think of Moses at the burning bush where God told him, "Do not come near!" (Exodus 3:5). Think of Peter when he came to understand that the Jesus standing before him is none other than God in the flesh so that "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord'" (Luke 5:8). Think of John in the Spirit when he saw the glory of Jesus he "fell at His feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17). Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden when they sinned. Cain's offering was not accepted because he did not approach God in faith. So many restrictions were put on the Old Testament people of God, so that even the High Priest could only come into the Holy of Holies once a year, and then only with the blood of sacrifice. Even the most religious and outwardly respectable Pharisee was rejected.

The purpose and result of salvation is to bring us into God's presence. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). We specifically come to God as "Father". So in the so-called Lord's Prayer we pray, "Our Father" (see John 4:21-24, 14:6). It is a beautiful picture. We do not expect to come to one who is our father and there still be a distance between us. Our Father in heaven cares for us in every detail so that even the hairs of our head are all numbered. As the Father of our Lord He loves us as He loves the Son (John 17:23). Do you know anything about this relationship? Do you pray to God as Father, not because you have learned the words from when you were a child, but because He really is a father to you? How is such a privilege and blessing possible?

(2) "Through Him (Son) ... we both have access"

It is through Jesus Christ the Son who has opened the way and cleared every obstacle. "Through Him we have obtained *access* by faith into this grace in which we stand, ..." (Romans 5:2). "... in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and *access* with confidence through our faith in Him" (Ephesians 3:12). How has He done this?

- By His humiliation, "the blood of Christ" (verse 13), "the cross" (verse 16). Sin is the great obstacle that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus takes the liability for our sin, the punishment we deserve falls on Him, so there is now no condemnation for us. If we have a great debt and another pays it for us, now we owe nothing and we are free from debt. Jesus has done by His one offering what the endless repetition of animal sacrifices could never have done (see Hebrews 10:11-14). Because there is real forgiveness there is no longer any offering for sin (verse 18). This is the reason why Christ is the only way to God. Mary did not take our sins and die for them, nor did Mohammed. And you cannot do

anything yourself. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

- By His exaltation, "He came and preached" (verse 17). He rose from the dead on the third day, triumphant over sin, because death is the wages of sin. He was received victorious into heaven at the Father's right hand, and He sent forth the Spirit who enables preachers who preach in Christ's name. Those who believe in this message of peace are brought to experience this access to God the Father. Christ is not dead but alive in heaven as our great High Priest on our behalf.

When you draw near to God in worship, do you consciously come relying on Christ alone? Are you conscious of your sin and that unless it is dealt with you cannot come into God's holy presence? Is the blood of Christ and His intercession in heaven your only hope?

### (3) "We both have access in one Spirit"

True worship is also dependent upon the help of the Holy Spirit. We do not think much about this. Do we automatically have the proper feelings and thoughts? The sad thing is that we can repeat written prayers without thinking about the words, such as The Lord's Prayer. The Spirit must enable us to speak from our hearts (see Matthew 15:8-9). We can have energy and noise but without the Spirit of truth it is unacceptable as our worship must be according to the will of God (see 1 John 5:14). It must be "in" the Spirit: "praying at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18), and "pray in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20). This is not a reference to praying in tongues as 'spirit' in 1 Corinthians 14:15 refers to the human spirit. It is the work of the Spirit in us that is absolutely essential. He must teach us what to pray for, giving us both the thoughts and the inexpressible feelings (Romans 8:27). It is His work to convict us of sin (John 16:8), to give us a new heart and a new understanding of Scripture, to show us more of the glory of Christ (John 16:14), and to give the desire and freedom to come to the Father (Romans 8:15-16). It is this dependence upon the Spirit that marks out a Christian. "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "We are the real circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God" (Philippians 3:3).

There is only "one" such Holy Spirit, the same for Jew and Gentile alike. This is the Spirit who indwells each and every child of God, without Whom you cannot truly have access to God. So our worship is not tied to any particular place as if it is 'holy'. This is how the Jews considered Jerusalem, and the Samaritans considered Gerizim. We will depend rather upon the Spirit who has given us the Scriptures, and pray that He will illumine our minds to understand them. Do you know anything of this?

Please note that our worship is Trinitarian. Each Person of the Trinity has a different role to play. The Father planned our salvation, the Son came to accomplish it in the world, and the Spirit works in applying it to us. It is amazing that the Triune God should be so interested in us so as to do all this for our salvation. This is the great glory of the Christian faith. What other so-called 'god' has claimed to do such? And this is available to anyone and everyone, for "we both" includes Jews and Gentiles, which is another way of saying the whole world. Such access can be your privilege, but you must first look to Christ to deal with your sin, and you must rely on the Spirit to have the wisdom and power to pray. How terrible to spend a whole life in religion but never having had real access to God.

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## EPHESIANS 2:19

### PRIVILEGES OF BELONGING TO THE CHURCH (1)

Do you count belonging to a local church a privilege, even the greatest privilege in this life? Sadly, some see 'church' as no more than a building, an organization. They 'go to church' once or twice a week and that is it. Excitement in life lies elsewhere. Look at Christians and their Facebook posts, and how little 'church' worship and life feature as most significant. Look at how the church has been deemed as irrelevant during the pandemic. If you understand what 'church' truly is then you will consider it quite differently.

Paul is writing a letter to a group of people in the city of Ephesus that make up the church there (1:1). Many were of Gentile background having had none of the privileges the Jews have (2:11-12). He wants to encourage these Gentile Christians not to feel as "strangers and aliens" amongst their Jewish brethren. He has been careful to point out that they did not first have to become Jews in order to have the privileges of the church, but both are reconciled to God and to each other (2:14-16). God has created "one new man" who is neither Jew nor Gentile, a new society in the world, the church. He takes three pictures from the Old Testament to show what a great privilege it is to belong to the church.

#### **1. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S NATION — *"Fellow citizens with the saints"***

Is it not a great privilege to be a citizen of a nation? If you are not a citizen, then you are an 'alien', and aliens have no rights or privileges. For the 40+ years I was in Kenya I was considered an alien. I had to apply to stay every three years and could be asked to leave at any time. I could not vote. Consider the Israelites in Egypt (Acts 7:6). Think about the vast numbers of refugees in camps such as Kakuma, in north-west Kenya. But for us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God has set up a Kingdom, and we are all its citizens. There are at least three reasons why this is such a great privilege.

##### **(1) *Our King is God Himself***

I would not like to be a citizen of some nations because their leader is an oppressive dictator. There are two characteristics about God our King that are so encouraging.

- God is love. We have a Triune God, each Person giving Himself unreservedly in planning, executing and applying those plans to make sure there is reconciliation (2:16) and access (2:18). It is amazing that I have personal, confident access to this God as my heavenly Father. The rulers of this world may promise great things but they are either insincere or unable to fulfil them. God is not like Pharaoh who withholds straw yet has the same demands. Our King gives the most wonderful commandments and the ability to obey by the gift of His Spirit.
- God is almighty. Our King reigns over all. He will defeat all apposition (1:22). Around us there is so much insecurity from terrorist threats to economic instability. But we have nothing to fear "for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). There is nothing that "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

## **(2) *Our fellow citizens are saints***

The “saints” are all those who are “faithful” in Christ Jesus (1:1), Gentiles as well as Jews. They are those for whom Christ died, so they love the One we love and serve the One we serve (1:7). They are those who are indwelt by one Spirit, so they have the One we have to reveal the truth to them and to enable them to bear fruit (1:13). In the Jewish nation, those who were not Jews (i.e. Gentiles) were 2<sup>nd</sup>. class citizens at best even if they had embraced the Jewish religion. It was this attitude that brought problems in the early church (see Acts 15 and Galatians 2:11-14). But “in Christ Jesus” there is “neither Jew nor Greek” just Christians as fellow citizens. We are proud of our national heroes, but Abraham, David and Paul are now our fellow citizens (Hebrews 12:22-24). All believers without exception have the same rights and privileges in God’s kingdom. Please note that there is nothing special about the Jewish nation today, despite support from some misguided Christians. The “holy nation” that was Israel in the Old Testament is now the church of believers in the New Testament (see 1 Peter 2:9).

## **(3) *Our citizenship is for ever***

The nations of this world are temporary at best. How many are more than 100 years old? Where are Babylon and Rome today? God’s kingdom will outlive all (Daniel 2:44) and will cover the earth as Jesus taught in the parable of the mustard seed where the birds of the air made nests in its branches (Luke 13:19). Even great America cannot prevent death from robbing her of her citizens. But we shall be transformed because “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,...” (Philippians 3:20-21). No one in his right mind would exchange the temporary for the eternal.

How can you know if you really are a citizen of God’s nation? If it is one of the nations of this world then I would ask you to produce a birth certificate, or a passport. I would want to know if you speak the language, and practice the culture. Consider the following three evidences.

➤ You represent your King. People will talk about, shout for, and defend anything they are greatly interested in. If you are a Kenyan at the Olympics and a Kenyan is winning you make it known you are a Kenyan! You should be eager to talk about the greatness of your King and the perfection of His kingdom. So how do you feel and react when your King is blasphemed? Or are you concealing the fact that you are a Christian? We have many enemies and we must know how to defend our country (nation/church).

➤ You put your nation before your personal interest. Lord Nelson is famously reported as stating before engagement in the battle of Trafalgar, ‘England expects that every man this day will do his duty’. If I am enlisted in the King’s army, what does He want me to do is my most urgent concern (2 Timothy 2:4). Those engaged in battle do not choose to have a day off to attend to personal affairs. Practically, citizens of the kingdom of God put the local church first in terms of service and attendance. Above everything else you want this Kingdom to be extended to be more mighty and glorious. Represent your nation by following its peculiar lifestyle (Philippians 1:27, 1 Peter 2:11-12). If you fall then your country falls with you.

➤ You do not feel at home anywhere else. I now live in U.K. having lived in Kenya for more than 40 years. I miss the food, the warm weather, and the friendliness of people of Kenya.

Similarly, outside the local church and the saints we feel like a strangers. In turn, we are not understood, for we have a different King, we are subject to different laws and customs, and this leads to persecution of one kind or another. Where are you most comfortable, most happy, most fulfilled? I hope you can say from the depths of your being that it is in the church.

## 2. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY – *“members of the household of God”*

Why does Paul go on to give a second picture of the church? Is it just repetition, or an important addition? The family is obviously a much smaller unit than the nation, as there are very many families in a nation. Consider the following two things about the family relationship compared to that within a nation.

- It is *personal*. A household typically lives under one roof so they know each other well (1 Timothy 5:8).
- It is *living*. National unity is based on law (a constitution), but this is a blood relationship. Many Kenyans have emigrated to the States, but home remains home. Home is the country of birth and the family from which they came.

So we need to think seriously about ourselves as Christians as being the family of God (see also Galatians 6:10). There are at least two things true of a family:

(1) ***There is a father*** (see verse 18). This is the great name for God in relationship to Christians. It must be emphasized that only Christians are God's children and He is their spiritual Father. Only believers have “the right to become the children of God” (John 1:12). Unbelievers have the devil as their father (as in 8:44). God is constantly called “our Father” – in the Lord's Prayer, 2 Corinthians 6:18, etc. He perfectly does towards us what fathers do:

- He provides for all our spiritual and physical needs (Ephesians 1:3).
- He protects us from all our enemies (John 17:11).
- He disciplines us to become more holy (Hebrews 12:7-10).

He is not only “in heaven” but also near to us, like a father surrounded by his children. What an encouragement this is to bear the family likeness (Matthew 5:45,48), to pray to Him (Matthew 6:6,8-9,14, 7:11), and to be content as regards the things of the world instead of being anxious (Matthew 6:26,32).

It is vital to ask yourself if God really is your Father. Here is a busy CEO who only has time to see top managers. But there is a little tap on the door as it opens and everything is pushed aside to spend time with his ... child. The God who made everything out of nothing, to whom all the nations are like the dust on the balance, is our Father. We have the right to approach Him at all times and in all situations. Nothing is too small or trivial. God is so interested in you as His child that the hairs of your head are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). There is no place for worry when your “heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matthew 6:32). If you claim your father is a rich man, yet you are worrying about what you will eat, it is hard to believe you. So is God really your Father in practice? Do you go to Him in prayer as a child to a father? Do you trust Him to do what seems best to Him? This is the great change that comes when you are converted to Christ.

(2) ***There are brothers and sisters*** (see 6:21,23). There is the closest possible relationship between siblings. We are not just brothers but dearly “beloved”, just as the Father refers to

His own Son (Philippians 4:1). This shows the intimacy of the relationship, the longing for and delight in fellow Christians. Where blood brothers and sisters are concerned we will typically do anything for them, whatever the difficulties. So as Christians we have both the privilege and duty to love one another (Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10), to serve one another (Galatians 5:13), to speak to each other for edification (Hebrews 3:12-13), to refrain from evil thoughts, speech and actions (Romans 14:13, James 4:11, 5:9), etc. A loving family holds its members accountable for its actions, for what one does impacts all.

It is now vital to ask yourself if Christians really are your brethren. For many it is sadly just a Sunday morning relationship, even barely more than a greeting. To such blood relatives are far more important than the Christian relationship. When a relative dies, even a distant one, there is commitment to incessant evening meetings, generous contributions are required, and days are taken off work to go home for the burial. It is not so much that this is wrong, but as much and more should be done for the brethren. The great mark of the Christian is practical love for the brethren (read in 1 John 2:9-10, 3:11,14,16-18, 4:7-12). When you are amongst Christians do you feel at home? Is it where you most want to be? This is why you need to be challenged if you seem to enjoy other things more on a Sunday, or you have no time to pray with your brethren at prayer meetings. When you hear of the need of fellow Christians do you respond with love knowing them to be dearly beloved brethren? The early Christians had “one heart and soul” with “everything in common” (Acts 4:32).

Here is a great difference between a genuine Christian and others. A man is either your father, or he is not. Others are either your siblings or they are not. It is so vital to know where you belong, and you can know. There is no need to be in doubt, groping in the dark. There is all the difference between a ‘stranger’ and a ‘member of the household’. Admittedly, none of us are perfect, and we fail to live up to our privileges. But in your heart you know the truth.

What a privilege this relationship is in a crowded world where so many people are lonely and discouraged. The Christian is not an insignificant speck in a vast universe of billions of galaxies! God is our heavenly Father and we have family members who would die for us. Have you ever known that you have lived “without God in the world” (2:12), so that you came to seek reconciliation with God through the blood of Jesus Christ? You realized you were not part of God’s family by nature and you sought adoption through faith in Christ.

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## **EPHESIANS 2:20-22**

### **PRIVILEGES OF BELONGING TO THE CHURCH (2)**

It is such a privilege to be a part of the church of God that three separate pictures are used to reveal it. In the last issue of *Grace & Truth*, we looked at the first two – to be in the church is to be a citizen of God’s nation and a member of God’s family (verse 19). The third privilege is revealed in more details, that of the church as a temple. Remember that Gentiles could not enter the Jewish temple upon pain of death. But now, not only can we Gentiles enter, we are actually part of the temple building itself! Everything is transformed into a fullness of blessing in these new covenant days. The Old Testament prophets had looked forward to all nations

coming to the temple in Jerusalem, even to a new temple, but this fulfilment transcends all this (as it always does!).

## 1. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S TEMPLE

God is engaged in a great building project – the church (Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 3:9). Christians who assemble as a church are called a temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Peter 2:5-6). A temple is a “dwelling place of God” (verse 22), see Exodus 25:8, Psalm 132:13-14. This is the special dwelling of God in the midst of His assembled people, yet how often are we His people so thoughtless! Amongst men a hush descends on an assembly when a great person enters.

This is yet again more wonderful than being a citizen and a family member. Family members live in separate rooms or houses and may not get on very well together. But the stones of a building must be well cemented together in order for the building to stand. There is permanent cohesion, “joined together” (verse 21) or there is no building. This emphasizes the *unity* of all of God's people, especially of Gentile with Jewish believers. A citizen can appeal to the king, and a child can approach the father, but God Himself dwells within this temple (so John 14:23).

### (1) **The Foundation:** *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”*

Every building that is made to last must have a proper foundation. Let us take note of the foundation of this temple which is the church.

- Apostles. These are the Twelve (+ Paul) as those called and sent by Christ (Luke 6:13). See Revelation 21:14. The apostles are a very special group of men with the very specific task to bear witness to the resurrection of our Lord, and so to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 2:32,36). They are the ones to whom Christ promised to reveal **all** the truth (John 14:26, 16:13).
- Prophets. They are listed here *after* the apostles, so they are the New Testament prophets (as in 3:5, 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28). A prophet is one to whom God reveals His message and who then brings it to the people (2 Peter 1:21). The apostles were also prophets, but there were also others like Agabus (Acts 11:27-28, 13:1, 21:10). The meaning may be ‘apostles + other prophets’ and are linked because they belong to the same class of teachers. So the foundation of the church is instruction, and for us this is the written word of God, the New Testament based upon the Old Testament revelation.

### (2) **The Cornerstone:** *“Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone”*

See other references in 1 Peter 2:6 (Acts 4:11), based on Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16. The cornerstone is part of the structure because it grows “in” Him (verse 21). It determines the shape and layout of the building as all is built upon it. The whole emphasis is on Christ as the cornerstone, “in whom” and “in Him”, so that the building is totally dependent upon Him. So the foundation is Christ, all that He has accomplished in His life, death and resurrection, and His teaching as completed and explained by His apostles and prophets. The message is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), and “repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).



### (3) Implications

This is such a vital text for us today as we stand back and gaze at the glory of the church.

- *There are no holy places because God's people themselves are the holy temple.* Let us put away the language of sanctuary, altar and priests, for **we** are God's temple. There is certainly no place for a future physical temple in Jerusalem, for we are the fulfilment of Ezekiel 40-48. Let us recognize how very special to God are all His people whoever they are.
- *The New Testament apostles and prophets are unique in the church.* They are the foundation which has already been laid and completed. The superstructure is now being built upon their teaching as recorded in the Scriptures. To claim that there are apostles and prophets today is to claim that God continues to reveal His truth and that the Bible is not complete. However, they remain as gifts in the church in the sense that we build upon what they have written. Further, 'Apostolic Succession' is a figment of the imagination. It is not the office but the teaching, the 'tradition' that is passed down.
- *The foundation of the church is the teaching of the Scriptures.* It is impossible to add to or to take away from the foundation. In the Scriptures, the 66 books of the Bible, God has revealed all we need to know for life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So whatever is to be believed, or whatever is to be condemned, must have the authority of the apostles and prophets as in their recorded writings in the Bible.
- *Church unity is based on faith in the teaching of the apostles and prophets.* If any teaching is not apostolic then the individual or group is not building on the true foundation, and it is another building! Without agreement on these things there can be no true unity. For example, consider the great teachings about sin and salvation that Paul the apostle has written in this very chapter (2). Specifically, salvation is through trust in Christ and Him alone, because He alone has died for our sins. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no young or old, no male or female, no rich or poor, or whatever else may divide people in the world. There is unity based upon the teaching of the Bible. This is the importance of steadfast devotion to the "apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42).
- *You are a stone in God's new temple only if you have received these teachings.* A Christian is one who believes from the heart certain great teachings (Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5) – Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3), His death and resurrection for our sins, justification by faith alone (Galatians 1:8-9, 2:15-16). Are you firmly fixed on this foundation? It is not enough just to attend a church assembly, or even to have knowledge.

## 2. THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE "*joined together*" (3:21)

You note that this temple is growing and the Gentiles are specifically being included, as in the Old Testament they were excluded. Watch a stone mason, who has many individual rough stones before him of various shapes and sizes. When he is ready to add another stone he looks for one that fits and will probably have to trim it so that it becomes a perfect fit. The verb Paul uses here, translated "*joined together*" (ESV), is one he seems to have coined himself, as we have not found it used anywhere before this time. It is made up of a word which basically means 'joint' (so Hebrews 4:12) which has the idea of two things coming together. The prefix meaning 'with' is added, so we have the idea of 'together' as in

symphony = voices together. The prefix is an unnecessary addition so that we do not miss the point of the stones perfectly fitting together. In Ephesians 4:16 it is translated, “joined and held together” (ESV). Elsewhere (KJV) it is translated, “fitly framed together” (2:21) and “fitly joined together” (4:16).

(1) *God chooses the stones.*

The stone does not place itself in the building! God first chose the very special cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4,6), and decided that the foundation would be apostles and prophets He chose, and so with every part of the building. So if we are in the temple it is because God chose to put us there (so 1:4), for none of us are fit in and of ourselves. This is a humbling truth as we always want to think that we have made at least some contribution. But there was nothing in you as a rough stone as a reason who God chose you. In fact He has every reason to reject you. When we speak with each other about being part of the temple we discover it was always the Lord who did it and we praise Him for it.

(2) *The stones are different and individually prepared.*

This is true in any beautiful stone building. There are Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, all kinds of people with differing abilities and characters, and this is the way it ought to be. In the cults and many African forms of Christianity everyone is the same, like mass production. But each individual stone is vital to the strength and beauty of the building (cf. the picture of the body in 1 Corinthians 12). God has an exact place in the wall for each of His people, for you. So do not wish to be someone else, but use the gifts the Lord has given you.

(3) *The stones are united to each other.*

There is the closest possible union of stone to stone, much more than the citizens of a nation, or the members of a household. There is a need to emphasize this as for many who call themselves Christian believers the ‘unity’ is just for a fleeting moment on a Sunday morning. I ask you to consider these three pictures and ask yourself if the close unity is true of you. If not, you must ask yourself whether your claim to be a living stone in this wonderful temple is backed up by evidence.

### **3. THE CHARACTER OF THE TEMPLE “holy” (3:21)**

It is a “holy” temple, which first of all means that it belongs to God for His exclusive use, and so is to be used according to His instructions alone. We must never use the church for ourselves and invent our new ways of worship, for example. If I were to come to your house as a guest I must abide by your rules. If you want me to take off my shoes at the door, it is what I must do, even if I do not do that in my house. In the Old Testament those who ignored God’s rules suffered terrible consequences. Nadab and Abihu “offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them” (Leviticus 10:1-2). Uzzah died because he touched the ark, and David confessed, “the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule” (1 Chronicles 15:13). Yet today the world has entered the church and sometimes it is hard to distinguish the two. The world ought to feel uncomfortable among God’s people, out of place, unable to understand us. Surely if the unbeliever enjoys our

worship there is something very wrong. In such a case it is unlikely he has been challenged by his sin, his hopelessness without Christ, and the necessity of repenting lest he perish.

#### **4. THE PURPOSE OF THE TEMPLE** *“a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”* (3:22)

A temple is not built for the comfort of the worshippers but for the glory of God, the One who is worshipped. We have not come, as to a concert, to enjoy ourselves, but to worship God, which is the greatest joy for the Christian. If you build your own home to live in it then you want it to be exactly according to your specifications. Let us remember that we are **God’s** temple and that we exist for Him, not He for us. Imagine going into a house but finding it empty. Let us honestly ask if the Spirit of God is really present amongst us.

- Only if we are built on the proper foundation, otherwise it is another building. It must be on Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures, as truly God and truly man, sinless, the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Adam who came to live the life we cannot live, and to die the death we deserve, raised and glorified, and returning
- How does the Spirit manifest His presence? Crowds? Loudness? Beautiful singing? The world can claim such things for itself. The Spirit works quite differently. He humbles us to see our utter unworthiness because of sin and ignorance. Then He shows us Christ as One in all our hopes may find fulfilment. This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The hearers were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37), for they were convicted of their sin of rejecting their Messiah. When we see a person abased and Christ exalted then we can be sure the Spirit is present, and God is glorified.

Everything in this temple is dependent upon Christ. He is the cornerstone. “In Him the whole structure is being joined together, and it grows “in the Lord”. Is that what our Lord Jesus Christ means to you?

As we glorify God for the privilege of belonging to the church, the temple of God, again note the Trinitarian emphasis. The Father makes the choice of the home/temple to dwell in; the Son purchases it; the Spirit takes possession of it. What a privilege to be a part of that temple in which the three Persons of the Trinity have been engaged in building from eternity in the grand plan of redemption. Be wise, be sure you are a stone through repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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