

Study 3: Ephesians Chapter 2

Introduction

As a “visitor” to a country, we have only basic human rights. We don’t belong there. It is not our home. Paul brings out this sense of where we do and do not belong in chapter 2.

The message of the chapter is “Look where you’ve come from – why would you want to go back there?”

Body of the Study

A Life and Death Situation

Saved by God’s Grace

Aliens and Citizens

United in Christ in the Church

Contrasts in Chapter 2

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read through chapter 2 again

Read the notes as a review of the study

Think through the contrast of our “former life outside of Christ” in chapter 2 with his call for “righteous living” in chapters 4 and 5.

Think about a time when you have been somewhere that you didn’t like, and didn’t want to be. What was it about it that made you want to leave? How did it feel to come back home again?

Read chapter 3 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 3: Ephesians Chapter 2

As a “visitor” to a country, we don’t belong there. It is not our home. We have only basic human rights, but not the same rights that we would have at home. The government might not protect us, or they might not even want us there. If you cause trouble you will be deported. If you get into trouble, you have to appeal to your home country to bargain with the country that you are in. They might not listen to your own government, and might not heed their pleadings.

There have been frequent examples in the news of the Australian Government having to make representation to foreign governments on behalf of Australians who are in trouble abroad.

Paul brings out this sense of where we do and do not belong in chapter 2.

A Life and Death Situation

Paul makes a lot of contrasts in the chapter, with the key one being Citizenship. It is about *belonging to the place* – this is where I belong. As a part of the Roman Empire, the people of the city enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship, and they would immediately have understood the message that Paul delivers here.

Paul begins with *life and death* – “...As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...” (2:1 NIV). He has (of course) in mind spiritual death, not physical death, since it is evident that they are physically alive! Whilst the first chapter was directed towards our blessings in Christ, he now challenges them to look back at their life before they became Christians. We can all look back at these times in our lives “...in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...” (2:2 NIV). Whilst the description of *the ruler of the kingdom of the air* is a little obtuse, the meaning is clear – it is a reference to Satan. In typical Paul style, he will build on this theme/reference to Satan later (in fact intertwined throughout the letter), as he talks about *spiritual warfare* that is going on in *heavenly places*. Satan is not asleep – he is active and *is now at work in those who are disobedient*. We only have to look around at the behaviour (generally) of those in the world, and remember that we used to be like them. Even if we didn’t do all of the things that they do, we are guilty in God’s sight for allowing Satan to rule us.

This was not unique to the Ephesians, and we can all identify with what Paul is saying “...All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts...” (2:3 NIV). The NIV frequently uses the term *sinful nature* whereas the NKJV uses the term *flesh*. Underlying this translation in the NIV is the idea (which I do not agree with) that we have all *inherited* our sin – the idea of “*original sin*” – that because Adam sinned, then we inherit that sin (our sinful nature) through his lineage. We are all responsible for our own actions, and our own sins – “...We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Rom 3:23). It is true that our fleshly desires (under the influence of Satan) leads us to sin, rather than leading us towards God, and to that extent the idea of *our nature being sinful* is consistent with scripture.

The first point of Paul’s argument in chapter 2 is concluded with the statement “...We were by nature children of wrath, just as the others...” (2:3 NKJV). The picture is one of hopelessness. When we look at the worldly people around us, we need to remember that we were once in the same situation ourselves.

Fortunately, that is not the end of the matter “...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved...” (2:4-5 NIV). The contrast is very stark. We were dead in sins, but have been made alive again – and in precisely the same way, Jesus was physically dead and was also made alive again. Paul describes the new birth in Romans 6:1-14. We died to sin (and to our

former lives as sinners), were buried with Christ in baptism, and have arisen as a new creature (a sinless person) in God's sight. The same thing that happened to Jesus physically (death, burial, resurrection) also happens to us spiritually (we die to sin, are buried in baptism, and rise to walk in newness of life).

We did not deserve the blessings that we have received, and it is only because of God's love for us, and His grace that we have been blessed. Even whilst we were God's enemies (because of our sins which separated us from Him), He continued (and continues) to love us – and so much so that He made the ultimate sacrifice, with the greatest price that has ever been paid.

Paul continues with the theme of life and death, in fact the theme of the new birth “...*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...*” (2:6 NIV). We have been raised up with Christ. Jesus was not only raised from the dead, but following His 40 days on earth He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God in the heavenly places. We also have the same assurance – after our baptism we are raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4) – and then with our “short time” on earth, we will be physically raised from the dead to be with Him forever more with the Father in the heavenly realms!

Both these events have their counterpart in the experience of believers. Not only do they anticipate resurrection and glorification at the end of the age; they are matched by a present realization of the risen life in Christ and of our participation with him in his ascended majesty (Col 3:1-4). (NIVBC).

It is clear that Paul has in mind a view of heaven, rather than our blessings on earth “...*in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus...*” (2:8 NIV). Whilst we stand in awe of God's creation, it is nothing to be compared with the grandeur and *incomparable riches* that will be revealed in heaven. We only receive these blessings because of God's grace, which has been revealed to us through Jesus.

Saved by God's Grace

God's grace – His unmerited favour towards us, is of a pivotal importance in the discussion of the relationship between God and His church (and *us* as members of that church). The word ‘grace’ comes from the Greek word *Charis* (Strong's number 5485) from which we also get the English word ‘charity’. We were charity cases, and totally unable to help ourselves out of the situation, and it was only because of God's intervention that we have received the blessings. “...*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...*” (3:8 NIV). There are clearly two parts in view that bring about our salvation – on one hand, God has provided the *means* of salvation, and on the other, we are only able to receive that salvation through our faith, and our response (obedience) to that faith. We do not deserve salvation, and there is nothing that we have done, or even possibly could do, that could put us into the situation where ‘*God owes us salvation, because we've worked for it*’.

In case we might have any ideas along these lines, Paul clears them up for us “...*not by works, so that no one can boast...*” (2:9 NIV). The great theme of *faith and works* permeates the New Testament, and it appears here. Whilst we are saved by faith, and not by works, that does not mean that we don't have to do anything! It means that we cannot *earn* our salvation. But, we still must have the appropriate response to our faith by our obedience to the gospel. In Hebrews chapter 11 – the great chapter of faith, sometimes called ‘Faith's hall of fame’ – we see explicitly in most of the examples the *action* that was put in place *because of* their faith. James describes it for us in James 2:14-26. A person who says that he has faith but doesn't respond in action (works) because of that faith, really doesn't have any faith at all.

In exactly the same way, Jesus showed His faithfulness by His obedience when He came to save us (Php 2:5-11). As those who belong to Christ – and model ourselves after His example “...*we*

are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do...” (2:10 NIV). It is not conceivable that a person who belongs to Jesus (ie a christian) could “sit back” and do nothing! Jesus went about doing good to others (Lk 9:11), and God wants us to live our lives after the way Jesus did (Heb 12:1-3). The alternate version makes this clear “...*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them...*” (2:10 NKJV). It requires us to “walk” – to make progress – in our christian lives.

This verse is the outcome of the whole process. It shows what salvation is intended for: to produce the good works that attest its reality. While works play no part at all in securing salvation, Christians will prove their faith by works. Here Paul shows himself at one with James (see Jas 2:14-26). We are God's "workmanship"--his work of art, his new creation. "Created" (GK G3231; also in OT, H1343) is a verb used exclusively of God and denotes the creative energy he exerts. The creation takes place "in Christ Jesus" (cf. vv. 6-7). The life of goodness that regeneration produces has been prepared for believers to "do" from all eternity. Here is a further reason why Christians have nothing left to boast about. Even the good they now do has its source in God, who has made it possible. (NIVBC).

Aliens and Citizens

The Jews considered themselves to be God's people, and they regarded circumcision as the sign of the covenant which came through Abraham. [For a special study on circumcision, refer to my Acts series, study 24.] The Jews regarded the Gentiles (those uncircumcised) as having *no part* as God's people, and totally rejected them. This became a problem in the first century, when the Jews (largely) rejected the message of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant, whilst the message was widely accepted by the Gentiles. As a result, the New Testament churches were generally made up by a minority of Jews and a larger contingent of Gentile christians. Needless to say, there were tensions between them, and Paul describes the two factions as ‘circumcision’ and ‘uncircumcision’. “...*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)...*” (2:11 NIV). In most cases “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” can simply be read as ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles’ and the context will show where this reading is not applicable.

As a part of the Roman Empire, the people of Ephesus enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship, and they would have immediately understood Paul's message of citizenship and aliens. He specifically addresses the Gentiles “...*remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world...*” (2:12 NIV). As a “visitor” to a country, we don't belong there. It is not our home. We have basic human rights, but not those that we would have at home.

Citizenship comes with certain rights, which vary from country to country:

- In this country (Australia) we have the right to medical treatment (a right incidentally, which is carried across any Commonwealth country that we might be visiting – as citizens of the Commonwealth, not just Australia). There might be some costs and charges for treatment, but as an alien there is NO subsidy – you pay for EVERYTHING.
- The right to education. Sure we pay some fees for higher education, but they are much less than the full fees that people from outside the country have to pay. And we don't pay for our primary and secondary education (unless we choose a private school). There are some “optional” costs, but the basic education is free.
- The right to vote. Some may argue about what it is worth, but it gives us the right to determine how we are governed. Aliens have NO RIGHTS in determining the governing of the country.
- In some countries, the right to own land. In Australia, land ownership by aliens is permitted, but in Japan for instance, it is only permitted by citizens.

Paul contrasts this idea of being aliens, with now having been made citizens – not of an earthly country, but of the commonwealth of God (the church). “...*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...*” (2:13 NIV). The contrast is plain and stark – why would we want to go back to being aliens?

It was through Jesus that we were brought into God’s kingdom, and it doesn’t matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles “...*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*” (2:14 NIV). The Jews and the Gentiles were divided by several things – fundamentally, their belief in God – but this was shown by the keeping of the Law of Moses, and the practice of the covenant of circumcision. Whilst the covenant of circumcision is still applicable to the physical descendants of Abraham, the Law was abolished at the cross. “...*by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...*” (2:15 NIV). Paul is quite clear about what the *dividing wall* is – it is the *Law, with its commandments*. Through Jesus’ sacrifice, God has made a “*new man*” out of the two – there is no longer a distinction made between Jews and Gentiles – *for we are all one in Christ Jesus*. (Gal 3:28).

United in Christ in the Church

The Old Testament (with the Law of Moses as the central pillar, and representative of it) was always intended to be transitional. It was only there to bring mankind to the point that we could be mature enough to understand the sacrifice of Christ. Through it, we also understand what it is to have a relationship with God, and what it means to obey and serve Him. But, God’s eternal purpose was to reconcile man to Himself through Jesus’ sacrifice, and to have the church – His called out body of people – as His shining glory – whether they are Jews or Gentiles. “...*and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility...*” (2:16 NIV). Paul uses a play on words here – the Jew / Gentile hostility has been put to death by the death of Jesus! If we have *been made alive* by Him (through the new birth), then we need to end (put to death) the fighting against our brothers and sisters in Christ. “...*He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near...*” (2:17 NIV). If God has made peace, then we need to make peace with others. This is a message not just for the Jews and Gentiles in the first century, but for us – that we should be united together with our brethren in the church “...*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit...*” (2:18 NIV). Whether Jews or Gentiles, we have been forged (welded) together through Christ, and as Christians, we have access to God through the Holy Spirit. [For a fuller discussion on the Holy Spirit, refer to my Romans notes, Study 10.] Whilst we don’t fully understand *how* the Spirit works, we do know that He (the Holy Spirit) acts with our spirit in making intercession to God. The Holy Spirit has revealed God’s will through the word, and because of that, we are able to have access to Him.

Through Jesus, and His sacrifice, we have been brought together as God’s children, and citizens of His kingdom (the church). “...*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...*” (2:19 NIV). We enjoy the rights of citizenship, and we are not excluded from its benefits. Paul describes the church as:

- The body of Christ (1:23)
- A kingdom with citizen rights (2:12-19)
- A household with family benefits (2:2:19)
- A building that is sound and built by God (2:20-22)
- A Holy Temple (2:21)

As a building (a spiritual building, not a physical church building), the church is strong, sound, and robust “...*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as*

the chief cornerstone..." (2:20 NIV). A physical building requires a solid foundation, or it will soon fail and crumble when the rains and storms arrive. The apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church.

The apostles are clear – they are named in Lk 6:13-16 (and other places). When Judas fell, his place was taken by Matthias (Acts 1:20, 26). A few years later, James became the first apostle to die, being slain by Herod in AD 44 (Acts 12:2), and about that time Paul began his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. [Whilst technically, it could be argued that Paul and James were both apostles at the one time, *practically* Paul's call to the work began after the death of James (Acts 13:2), so there were only 12 at any one time].

However, the prophets are not quite so easy. A prophet is *an inspired spokesperson for God*. In some cases they *foretold* of future events, whilst in others they *forthtold* the things that God had revealed to them. For an example of the latter, see Lk 1:67-79, where Zacharias is said to be prophesying as he proclaims God's word. Whilst the writers of many of the New Testament books were apostles (Matthew, John, Peter and Paul), some were not written by apostles (Mark, Luke, Hebrews, James, Jude). These writers wrote by inspiration, and as inspired spokespersons for God, they wrote as prophets. So, we have the whole of the New Testament written as "*...the foundation of the apostles and prophets...*"

The analogy of a building is further developed, with *Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. The cornerstone was chosen from the building blocks as the most perfect, square, and true building block. From it, the rest of the building was set out. If the cornerstone was out of square, the rest of the building would end up out of square. Jesus is described as "*...the stone which the builders rejected, is become the head of the corner...*" (1 Pet 2:4,7). Jesus was rejected by the Jews, but God has placed Him in the prime position in His (God's) building – the church. "*...In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord...*" (2:21 NIV). The function of the cornerstone is further brought out here, as the part of the building that binds the rest together. Without Jesus, the church is pointless, and it is through Him (and Him alone) that we are bound to each other and to God. The idea is not of a completed building, but we are a work-in-progress as we grow as Christians. "*...And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit...*" (2:22 NIV).

Paul refers to "whole building" rather than to each separate building. It has no article in the Greek, implying that the work is still in progress--i.e., "all building that is being done." "Rises" strengthens the insistence on continuing progress and organic growth. The word used for "temple" (GK G3724) denotes not the entire holy precinct, but the inner shrine. This metaphor is applied in the NT to both the individual and the church (cf. 1Co 3:16-17; 6:19; 2Co 6:16). Without doubt, Paul had the Jewish temple in mind, but he may also have had in mind the famous temple of Artemis at Ephesus, which was one of the seven wonders of the world. (NIVBC).

Paul contrasts the blessed position we enjoy as Christians with the hopeless and destitute position outside of Christ. Why would we want to go back there?

Contrasts in Chapter 2

<p style="text-align: center;">BEFORE WE BECAME CHRISTIANS</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“IN CHRIST”</p>
<p><i>Our state</i> Dead (by living in sin) Separate from Christ</p> <p><i>Our behaviour</i> Followed worldly ways Disobedient</p> <p><i>Our motivation</i> Self gratification Cravings of the flesh Sinful desires and thoughts</p> <p><i>How God sees us</i> Objects of wrath</p> <p><i>The results</i> Excluded from citizenship in Israel Foreigners to the covenant of promise</p> <p><i>Our Outlook</i> Without hope Without God in the world</p>	<p>Alive in Christ Now in Christ Jesus</p> <p>Do good works</p> <p>Incomparable riches of His grace His kindness to us Saved by grace Recipients of God’s gift</p> <p>God’s workmanship Created in Christ Jesus</p> <p>No longer foreigners and aliens Fellow citizens with God’s people Members of God’s household A dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Seated with Christ in heavenly realms Brought near by his blood Reconciled to God through the cross No longer Jews or Gentiles</p> <p>Access to the Father by the Spirit</p>