

## **Ephesians Chapter 2**

### **A Deep Expository Study: Dead, Raised, and Built Together -- The Miracle of Grace, the Abolition of the Dividing Wall, and the Church as God's Dwelling Place**

## **Introduction to Ephesians Chapter 2**

### **From the Pit to the Palace -- and Then to the Temple**

If Ephesians chapter 1 is the view from the summit -- the eternal, cosmic, Trinitarian sweep of God's saving purpose seen from the highest possible vantage point -- then Ephesians chapter 2 is the view from the ground. It begins in the lowest place imaginable: dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the prince of the power of the air, children of wrath by nature. And it ends in the highest place imaginable: fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. The distance between these two points -- between spiritual death and becoming God's own dwelling -- is the distance that grace travels. And chapter 2 is Paul's most concentrated, most awe-inducing map of that journey.

The chapter divides with remarkable clarity into two equal and complementary halves. The first half (verses 1-10) is the story of the individual's salvation -- the movement from death to life, from wrath to grace, from being a child of the devil to being God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. The second half (verses 11-22) is the story of corporate salvation -- the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity, the demolition of every dividing wall of hostility, the creation of one body through the cross, and the construction of a single holy temple in which God Himself dwells by His Spirit.

Together these two halves constitute one of the most complete statements of what the gospel achieves in the New Testament. The gospel does not merely save individuals and leave them isolated. It creates a community -- a new humanity -- that is itself the evidence of what God can do when His grace is fully unleashed on human division, hatred, and pride. The church is not merely the gathering place of the saved. The church is the evidence of the gospel. It is God's exhibit A to the watching universe of what redemption looks like when it reaches its full corporate expression.

### **Why This Chapter Follows Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 described the blessings that belong to believers 'in Christ' -- election, redemption, adoption, sealing, the hope of inheritance. A natural question follows: but who are these people who have received such extraordinary blessings? What were they before? What was the condition from which they were rescued? Chapter 2 answers those questions with a directness and a darkness that is essential for understanding the

magnitude of the grace described. You cannot fully appreciate what grace has done unless you understand what grace found. And what grace found was not people who were spiritually sick or morally impaired or simply lacking in religious education. What grace found was the dead.

## The Structure of Chapter 2

The chapter moves through four major sections. First, the diagnosis of humanity's condition apart from Christ -- dead, dominated, and under divine wrath (vv. 1-3). Second, the intervention of God described in one of the most beautiful 'but God' statements in all of Scripture -- raised, seated, and saved by grace through faith (vv. 4-10). Third, the condition of the Gentiles specifically before the gospel -- excluded, alienated, without God and without hope (vv. 11-12). Fourth, the reconciling work of Christ -- the abolition of the dividing wall, the creation of one new humanity, the peace proclaimed to both those far and near, and the building of one holy temple in which God dwells (vv. 13-22).

### **Opening Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, we come to Ephesians chapter 2 knowing that we are about to see ourselves in a mirror -- the mirror of what we were before Your grace reached us, and the mirror of what Your grace has made us. Lord, do not let us rush past the darkness of the first three verses. Let us sit in them long enough to understand what we were rescued from, so that the 'but God' of verse 4 lands with its full, staggering weight. Let gratitude grow in us as we see the distance grace has traveled on our behalf.*

*And as we come to the second half of the chapter, Lord, give us eyes to see the church as You see it -- not as a flawed human institution to be criticized or managed, but as the new humanity created by the cross, the holy temple in which You have chosen to dwell, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Let that vision raise our love for the church, our commitment to one another, and our wonder that You would make Your home in us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## Ephesians 2:1-3 -- The Diagnosis: Dead, Dominated, and Under Wrath

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

### **IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH**

Before Christ reached you, you were dead. Not just sick, not just confused, not just in need of some moral improvement -- dead. Spiritually dead, cut off from

the life of God. And in that death you were still active -- moving, living, doing things -- but your movement was governed by two things: the spirit of this present age, and the ruler of the air, which is Satan himself, who is actively working in people who are living in disobedience to God. And before any of us start feeling superior, Paul includes himself and all his Jewish companions in this: all of us lived that way. Gratifying what the flesh wanted. Following its desires and its thinking. We were all, by our very nature, people who deserved God's wrath. That was the starting point.

## **"You Were Dead in Your Transgressions and Sins"**

Paul opens the chapter not with a description of moral failure or spiritual weakness but with a declaration of death. The condition of every human being apart from Christ is not merely sick, not merely incomplete, not merely misinformed -- it is dead. The word (nekros) is not ambiguous or metaphorical in a weak sense. It means what it says. Dead. This is spiritual death -- the death of the relationship with God, the death of genuine responsiveness to divine reality, the death of the capacity to perceive and embrace spiritual truth by natural ability alone. The dead person is alive physically and socially and intellectually. They are capable of great beauty, moral achievement, intellectual brilliance, and relational warmth. But they are dead in their relationship to God.

This matters enormously for how we understand both evangelism and sanctification. If the condition of unregenerate humanity is death, then the solution is not persuasion -- as though the right argument will convince the dead to live. The solution is resurrection. And resurrection is something only God can do. This is why Paul will use the language of creation and resurrection in verse 10 to describe what happens in the new birth. It is not self-improvement. It is an act of God analogous to the original creation and to the raising of Christ from the dead.

## **"Following the Ways of This World"**

The dead person is not static. They are active -- walking, following, living. And their movement is governed by two authorities. The first is 'the ways of this world' -- literally, 'the age of this world,' the entire spirit and orientation of the present evil age (Galatians 1:4) that operates according to values, assumptions, and priorities that are fundamentally opposed to God. The world-system -- with its definitions of success, its hierarchies of value, its assumptions about what matters and what does not -- is itself an authority that shapes and governs those who have no alternative authority to orient them.

## **"The Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air"**

The second governing authority is more personal and more alarming: 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.' This is a reference to Satan -- who exercises a real, active, spiritual influence in the lives of those who are apart from Christ. Paul does not present the unregenerate world as merely morally confused or socially misguided. He presents it as operating under active satanic influence. The point is not a geography lesson but a spiritual reality: there is a personal,

malevolent spiritual authority who is actively working in the disobedient -- shaping their desires, distorting their perceptions, feeding their rebellion, and keeping them from the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

## "By Nature Deserving of Wrath"

The chapter's diagnosis closes with one of the most confronting phrases in all of Paul's writing: 'Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.' The phrase 'by nature' (physei) is critical -- it indicates that the condition being described is not merely the result of bad choices accumulated over time. It is the natural condition of humanity as a whole, inherited from Adam, resident in every human being from birth. The wrath Paul refers to is not an emotional divine anger that flares and subsides. It is the settled, holy, just opposition of God to everything that contradicts His character -- the divine judgment that rests on a humanity that has, in Adam and in its own choices, turned from the living God. This phrase is the darkness against which the light of the next verse blazes with its full brilliance.

## Key Observations

- **Spiritual death is the accurate diagnosis of humanity apart from Christ** -- not weakness or sickness but death, requiring resurrection, not improvement.
- **The dead person is active -- walking, following, living** -- but their movement is governed by the world-system and satanic influence, not by God.
- **The diagnosis is universal** -- Jew and Gentile alike are 'by nature deserving of wrath,' making every human being equally dependent on grace.
- **Transgressions and sins together describe both deliberate rebellion and pervasive falling short** -- the full scope of human moral failure.
- **'By nature' establishes that the human condition is not merely behavioral but constitutional** -- inherited from Adam, requiring divine intervention at the level of nature itself.

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## Ephesians 2:4-10 -- "But God": Raised, Seated, and Saved by Grace

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 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. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

### IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

But God. Two words that change everything. We were dead -- but God, who is overflowing with mercy and moved by His great love for us, made us alive together with Christ. Even while we were dead. This is grace. And God did not stop there -- He raised us up with Christ and sat us down with Him in the heavenly realms. Right now, our identity and standing are defined by where Christ is -- at the pinnacle of all authority. And here is why God did all of this: so that in the ages to come He could put on display the incomparable riches of His grace, through the way He has treated us in Christ Jesus. Now here is the bottom line: you were saved by grace, through faith. None of it came from you. It is the gift of God. Not by works, so that absolutely no one can boast. Because here is what you actually are: you are God's masterpiece -- His work of art -- created in Christ Jesus to walk in good works that He laid out for you before you were even born.

## "But God"

Two words. The hinge of history. The pivot of the entire human story. 'But God.' After three verses of the most concentrated darkness in Paul's letters -- dead, dominated by the world, under satanic influence, by nature deserving of wrath -- two words change everything. Not 'but we' -- we could not change our own condition. Not 'but the law' -- the law can diagnose but not cure. Not 'but religion' -- religion cannot raise the dead. But God. These two words are the structural heart of all Christian theology. They appear in this same decisive function throughout Scripture. Joseph's brothers meant evil against him -- but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). We were dead in transgressions -- but God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive. The pattern is always the same: human inability reaches its absolute limit, and then God acts.

## "Rich in Mercy" and "Great Love"

Before Paul describes what God did, he describes who God is. God acted because of who He is -- not because of what we deserved or what we could offer. He is 'rich in mercy' -- not merely merciful, but wealthy in mercy, overflowing with it, possessing an inexhaustible supply that no amount of human sin can exhaust. And the motivation behind the action is even more personal: 'because of his great love for us.' The word (agape) is not affection based on the attractiveness of its object. The Ephesians were dead in trespasses and sins -- there was nothing attractive about them from a moral or spiritual standpoint. But God's love does not originate in the lovableness of its object. It originates in God Himself. He loved because He is love (1 John 4:8). And that love -- great, sovereign, purposeful -- is the reason for everything that follows.

## "Made Us Alive with Christ Even When We Were Dead"

The miracle is stated with maximum compression: God 'made us alive with Christ even when we were dead.' The Greek word (syzoopoieo -- to make alive together with) is one of a series of compound 'with Christ' verbs Paul uses in these verses: made alive

together, raised together, seated together. The prefix 'together' (syn) indicates that what happened to Christ has happened to the believer -- not as a parallel experience but as a shared one. We are made alive with the One who was raised. We are raised with the One who ascended. We are seated with the One who is enthroned. When Christ rose from the dead, He rose as the firstfruits of a new humanity (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and those who are in Him share the resurrection He inaugurated. Paul interrupts himself with a parenthetical: 'it is by grace you have been saved.' He is so arrested by the sheer gratuity of what he is describing that he cannot continue the sentence without naming the principle behind it.

### **"Seated with Him in the Heavenly Realms"**

Verse 6 makes a declaration that should stop every believer in their tracks: God has already 'seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.' This is a present-tense, already-accomplished reality. Not a future promise -- an accomplished fact. The same position of supreme authority that Paul described Christ occupying in 1:20 -- seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority -- is the position in which believers have already been placed, in Christ. Our identity, our status, and our spiritual location are defined by where Christ is -- at the pinnacle of all authority -- because we are in Him. The Christian life, properly understood, is not an ascent from the bottom to the top. It is a life lived from the security of an already-established heavenly standing.

### **The Purpose: Display in the Coming Ages**

Verse 7 gives the purpose behind the entire movement of grace: '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.' The salvation of human beings is not ultimately about the humans. It is ultimately about the display -- the eternal, ever-deepening, ever-more-fully-perceived display -- of the incomparable riches of God's grace. In the coming ages -- in the eternal future that stretches beyond history's end -- God will be showing what He did in Christ to an audience that will be continually discovering new depths of wonder in the grace that saved those who were dead, dominated, and deserving of wrath. The redeemed are not merely the recipients of grace. They are the exhibit -- the living, eternal demonstration of what grace can do and what grace is.

### **"By Grace Through Faith -- the Gift of God"**

Verses 8-9 contain the most concentrated statement of the doctrine of grace in all of Paul's letters: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast.' Every word carries weight. Saved -- the comprehensive rescue from sin, death, wrath, and alienation from God. By grace -- as the ground, the source, the originating cause. Through faith -- as the channel, the instrument, the receiving posture. Not from yourselves -- even the faith is not a contribution from the human side that sets salvation in motion. It is the gift of God. The entire complex -- the grace, the salvation, the faith by which it is received -- is God's gift. The elimination of boasting is not incidental -- it is the point. A salvation that left room for human boasting would be a salvation that served

human pride rather than God's glory. Grace eliminates boasting by constructing a salvation in which there is literally nothing for the human being to boast about.

## "We Are God's Handiwork"

Verse 10 completes the section with one of the most profound and beautiful statements in the letter: 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.' The word for handiwork (poiema -- from which we get the English word 'poem') means a work of art, a masterpiece, something crafted with skill and intention and care. We are God's masterpiece -- crafted in Christ Jesus with as much deliberate intention and creative investment as the original creation of the world. But the masterpiece has a purpose. We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Works are not the ground of salvation; they are the goal of salvation. The grace that saved us was always grace that intended to produce something -- a life transformed, a community restored, a world served, a God glorified in concrete acts of love and justice and sacrifice. And those works were 'prepared in advance' -- before you existed, before you were saved, God had already prepared the good works that your life in Christ was designed to accomplish.

## Key Observations

- **'But God' is the pivot of the entire human story** -- God's intervention at the point of absolute human inability.
- **God acts out of who He is -- rich in mercy, characterized by great love** -- not out of anything in the recipient.
- **The compound 'with Christ' verbs (made alive, raised, seated) express the believer's participation in Christ's own resurrection and exaltation** through union with Him.
- **The purpose of salvation is the eternal display of God's incomparable grace** -- the redeemed are God's exhibit to the watching universe and coming ages.
- **Salvation is by grace through faith, both of which are God's gift** -- eliminating every possible ground for human boasting.
- **We are God's poiema -- His masterpiece, His work of art** -- created in Christ Jesus for good works He prepared in advance.

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## Ephesians 2:11-12 -- Remember What You Were: Excluded, Alienated, Without Hope

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

#### **IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH**

So here is what you need to keep remembering -- do not forget this: before Christ reached you, you were Gentile outsiders. The circumcised Jewish people had a label for you, and it was not a kind one. And here is what that outsider status actually meant in real terms: you had no connection to Christ whatsoever. You were not citizens of God's covenant people. You were foreigners to every promise God had ever made. You had no hope -- not a vague lack of optimism, but genuinely no future to look forward to beyond death. And you were without God - - not without religion, because the pagan world was full of gods -- but without the real, living, covenant-keeping God. That was where the gospel found you. Keep remembering it.

## **The Command to Remember**

The second half of the chapter opens with an imperative that is as important as it is easily overlooked: 'remember.' Paul is not merely providing historical information about what Gentiles used to be. He is commanding an ongoing, deliberate, formative act of memory. The Ephesian Gentiles are to remember what they were -- to hold that memory with intentionality and allow it to function as the permanent background against which the grace of their present condition is understood and appreciated. Memory is a spiritual discipline in Paul's understanding. The person who forgets what they were is in danger of taking for granted what they have become. The community that forgets its former exclusion is in danger of becoming exclusive toward others. The command to remember is a guard against spiritual amnesia -- and spiritual amnesia is one of the most common and most destructive diseases in the Christian life.

## **The Former Condition of the Gentiles**

Paul describes the Gentile condition before the gospel in five overlapping phrases, each adding a dimension of the exclusion that characterized their pre-Christ existence. 'Separate from Christ' -- before the gospel, the Gentiles had no connection to the Messiah. 'Excluded from citizenship in Israel' -- to be excluded from citizenship in Israel was to be outside the covenant community, with no legal standing in the household of God. 'Foreigners to the covenants of the promise' -- God's covenantal dealings with Abraham, with Moses, with David were not addressed to the Gentiles. They were strangers to this covenant history. 'Without hope' -- the pagan world of the first century was characterized by a profound hopelessness about death and the future. The grave was final. History was cyclical and going nowhere. 'Without God in the world' -- the Greek word is *atheos* -- from which we get 'atheist.' The Gentiles had gods but not the God. To have gods but not the living God is, in the most fundamental sense, to be without God.

## **Key Observations**

- **Memory is a spiritual discipline** -- the command to remember is a guard against the spiritual amnesia that produces ingratitude and exclusivity.
- **The five descriptions of Gentile exclusion are cumulative and comprehensive** -- each one adds a dimension of the total spiritual destitution of life without the covenant.
- **'Without hope and without God in the world' is not rhetoric** -- it is the accurate theological description of a humanity without covenant, Messiah, or resurrection.
- **The distance between 'without God' and 'dwelling place of God by the Spirit' (verse 22)** is the distance grace travels in this chapter.

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## Ephesians 2:13-18 -- The Reconciling Work of Christ: Near, One New Humanity, and Peace

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their mutual hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

### IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

But now -- in Christ Jesus -- everything is different. You who were far away from God, far outside the covenant, far from any hope -- you have been brought near. And what brought you near was not your religious effort or cultural achievement. It was the blood of Christ. He Himself is our peace -- not just the one who made peace possible, but the One in whom peace actually exists. He took the two groups -- Jew and Gentile -- who had been kept apart by a wall of hostility, and He made them one. He tore down that dividing wall. He did it by setting aside in His own body the law's commands and regulations that kept the two groups separated. His purpose was to create something brand new: one new humanity out of the two -- not Jew absorbing Gentile or Gentile replacing Jew, but something entirely new, united in Him. And through the cross He reconciled both groups to God in one body, putting to death the hostility between them. Then He came and announced this peace -- to those who were far away and to those who were near. And now, through Him, both groups have equal access to the Father, by one Spirit.

**"But Now in Christ Jesus"**

Once again, as in verse 4, the second half of the chapter is introduced by a decisive contrast. 'But now' -- at this present moment, in the new era inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ. What was true before Christ -- exclusion, separation, alienation, hopelessness -- is no longer true for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the reason for the change is named immediately and without ambiguity: 'the blood of Christ.' The ground of the Gentiles being 'brought near' is the death of Jesus Christ. The language of 'far' and 'near' echoes Isaiah 57:19 -- 'Peace, peace, to those far and near.' In Jewish understanding, 'far' referred to the Gentiles, 'near' to Israel. The fundamental distinction that organized the ancient world's understanding of who was inside and who was outside God's covenant has been abolished.

### **"He Himself Is Our Peace"**

Verse 14 makes one of the most precise and important Christological statements in the letter: 'For he himself is our peace.' Not merely the source of peace, not merely the procurer of peace, not merely the one who announced peace -- He Himself, in His own person, is the peace between the formerly divided parties. The reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, and more fundamentally the reconciliation between humanity and God, is not a state that Christ created and then stepped back from. It is a reality that subsists in Christ -- because both the formerly separated parties are now in Him, the separation between them has been overcome in His person. Peace is not a condition the cross achieved that can be maintained independently of Christ. Peace is Christ. Division in the church is not merely a failure of community management. It is a contradiction of the gospel.

### **The Dividing Wall of Hostility Destroyed**

Paul describes Christ's reconciling work in terms of demolition: He has 'destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.' The image is vivid and historically specific. The Jerusalem Temple had a literal dividing wall -- the *soreg* -- that separated the outer court (to which Gentiles had access) from the inner courts (reserved for Jewish worshippers). Inscriptions found by archaeologists warned that any Gentile who crossed this barrier did so on pain of death. The physical wall in the Temple was the architectural expression of a theological reality: Gentiles were excluded from the inner life of God's covenant people. Christ has demolished this wall -- not merely the physical structure, but the theological principle it represented. The law that created the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been 'set aside in his flesh.' In His death, Christ fulfilled the law's demands and ended its function as a dividing line between peoples.

### **"One New Humanity"**

The goal of Christ's reconciling work is stated with extraordinary precision in verse 15: 'His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.' This phrase -- 'one new humanity' -- is one of the most revolutionary statements in all of Paul's writings. The solution to the division between Jew and Gentile is not the absorption of one into the other. It is the creation of something entirely new. Neither Jew nor Gentile, as those identities were previously constituted by the law, is the template for the new community. Something new has been created -- a new humanity, a new anthropological category, in which all the old dividing markers have been overcome.

and the defining identity is Christ. The church, when it is truly being the church, is this one new humanity -- people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 7:9) brought into a single community by the blood of Christ, defined not by ethnic or cultural or social categories but by their common membership in the new humanity inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection.

## Reconciliation to God Through the Cross

Verse 16 adds the vertical dimension to the horizontal: 'and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their mutual hostility.' The reconciliation between Jew and Gentile is not merely sociological -- it is grounded in and enabled by a deeper reconciliation with God. The cross does not merely bring two human groups together. It brings them both -- together, in one body -- into right relationship with God. The cross put to death the mutual hostility -- absorbing in His own body the hostility, the sin, the curse, and the divine judgment that stood between humanity and God and between human groups who had learned to define themselves by their differences. The death of Christ is not merely a transaction between God and individual sinners. It is the event that creates a new humanity.

## "Access to the Father by One Spirit"

Verse 18 is one of the most compact Trinitarian statements in the New Testament: 'through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.' Through the Son, to the Father, by the Spirit. All three persons are present in this single act of access -- the believer's ability to come before God the Father in prayer and worship. The word for access (prosagoge) was used in the ancient world for the formal introduction of a person into the presence of a king. Christ is that mediator. Through Him -- through His blood, His righteousness, His mediation -- both Jew and Gentile have the same access to the Father. Not separate access. Not access of different grades. The same access, equally, by one Spirit. The equality of access is the ground of the equality of standing.

## Key Observations

- **The blood of Christ is the exclusive ground of the Gentiles being 'brought near'** -- no human religious achievement, cultural progress, or moral effort could accomplish what the cross accomplished.
- **Christ Himself is our peace** -- reconciliation is not a state He created and stepped back from but a reality that subsists in His person.
- **The dividing wall was demolished not just as a social achievement but as a theological necessity** -- the law's function as a boundary marker ended at the cross.
- **The one new humanity is neither Jew nor Gentile** -- it is an entirely new creation, a new anthropological category defined by Christ.
- **The cross addresses both the vertical enmity (humanity vs. God) and the horizontal hostility (group vs. group) simultaneously and in one act.**
- **Equal access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit** is the ground of the equality of all believers before God.

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## Ephesians 2:19-22 -- The Building: Fellow Citizens, God's Household, and the Holy Temple

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is being joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place of God by his Spirit.*

### IN SIMPLE AMERICAN ENGLISH

So here is where you stand now: you are not outsiders anymore. Not foreigners, not strangers, not visitors on a temporary pass. You are full citizens of God's people -- same rights, same standing, same inheritance as everyone else. And even more than that, you are members of God's own household -- family. You belong here. And you are part of a building that is going up -- built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone that everything else is aligned to. In Him, the whole building is being carefully fitted together, rising up to become a holy temple in the Lord. And you are part of it -- you are being built together into a place where God Himself lives, by His Spirit. You are the dwelling place of God.

### "No Longer Foreigners and Strangers"

The chapter closes with a series of three overlapping images -- each one describing the new status of those who were once excluded, each one building on and surpassing the previous. The first image is civic: 'you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people.' The Gentiles who were once excluded from citizenship in Israel (verse 12) have been granted full citizenship in the new covenant community. Not resident aliens. Not guest workers. Not second-class members who have limited access and fewer rights. Full citizens -- with the same standing, the same rights, the same inheritance, the same access as those who have been in the covenant from the beginning. The second image moves from civic to domestic -- from the city to the family: 'members of his household.' This intensifies the citizenship image significantly. You can be a citizen of a nation without being part of a family. But membership in God's household is membership in His family -- those who share the common life of the household, those who have a place at the table and a share in the inheritance. The Gentile believers who were once 'without God in the world' are now members of God's own family.

### "Built on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets"

The third and final image is architectural: the church is a building under construction. The foundation of this structure is 'the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.' The apostles and prophets here refer to the New Testament apostles (and likely the Old Testament prophets as well) whose proclamation of the gospel and whose inspired writings form the doctrinal foundation on which the church is built. The church is not free to build on any foundation it chooses -- it is defined by and accountable to the apostolic message. The 'chief cornerstone' (akrogoniaios) in ancient construction was the stone placed at the corner where two walls meet -- the stone that determined the alignment of the entire building. Every other stone was laid in relation to the cornerstone. Christ is this stone. Every other element of the church's life - its teaching, its community, its worship, its mission -- is aligned in relation to Him. Where He is properly centered, the building rises true.

### **"The Whole Building Being Joined Together"**

Verse 21 describes the construction process with a continuous-tense verb: the building 'is being joined together' -- a present, ongoing, active process. The church is not a finished structure. It is a building under construction -- rising, growing, being fitted together as new living stones are added through the gospel and as existing stones are shaped and fitted more precisely to one another by the Spirit. The word for 'joined together' (synarmologeō -- to fit together precisely, to join as in a mortised joint) implies a precision and an intentionality in the fitting. The stones are not thrown together randomly. They are fitted -- each one shaped to its place, each one joined to the others in a way that creates structural integrity and allows the building to bear weight and rise higher. This is the work of the Spirit in the church -- the careful, patient, often painful work of fitting diverse, differently shaped people together into a community of genuine unity.

### **"A Holy Temple in the Lord"**

The building rises 'to become a holy temple in the Lord.' This is the most astonishing description of the church in the entire letter. The Jerusalem Temple was the place where God's presence uniquely dwelt -- the holy of holies, the place where the shekinah glory resided. Paul says: the church is the new temple. The community of believers -- made up of Jews and Gentiles who were once far apart, now fitted together by the blood of Christ -- is the place where God has chosen to dwell in this age. Not in a building of stone. In a community of people. The divine presence that once filled the holy of holies now fills the assembled community of those who are in Christ. This is not a demotion from the Jerusalem Temple -- it is an elevation beyond it. The stones of the Jerusalem Temple were cut and fitted by human hands. The stones of this new temple are human beings -- shaped by the Spirit, fitted to one another by the cross, indwelt by the living God.

### **"A Dwelling Place of God by His Spirit"**

The chapter closes with its most intimate and most stunning declaration: 'And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling place of God by his Spirit.' The word for dwelling place (katoikēterion) means a permanent residence -- not a temporary camp or a passing visitation but a settled home. God is not a guest in the church. He is not visiting from time to time when the worship is particularly good or the sermon

particularly true. He has taken up permanent residence. He dwells there. The church is His home. And this dwelling is corporate -- 'you too are being built together.' When the church gathers, God is home. When the new humanity comes together across every human dividing line and worships and serves and loves in the name of Christ, God is visibly, tangibly, spiritually present in a way that He is not present anywhere else in the world. The chapter that began with 'dead in trespasses and sins' ends with 'a dwelling place of God by His Spirit.' The distance between those two points is infinite. Only grace could travel it. And that grace has.

## Key Observations

- **The three closing images -- citizens, household members, building stones** -- each surpass the previous in intimacy, moving from public belonging to family belonging to being the very dwelling place of God.
- **The apostolic foundation means the church is accountable to the gospel as proclaimed by Christ's commissioned messengers** -- there is no church without the apostolic word.
- **Christ as cornerstone determines the alignment of everything** -- where He is properly centered, the community is shaped truly.
- **The church as holy temple is not a demotion from the Jerusalem Temple but an elevation** -- living stones indwelt by the living God surpass cut stones visited by the divine presence.
- **'A dwelling place of God by His Spirit' is a permanent, settled residential image** -- God is at home in His church.

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## What This Chapter Means for Us Today

### 1. Sit with the Darkness Before You Rush to the Light

Ephesians 2 opens in darkness deliberately. Paul does not give us two verses of diagnosis and then rush to the remedy. He gives us three full verses -- dead, dominated, deserving of wrath -- and commands us to stay with that reality long enough for it to shape how we understand everything that follows. The contemporary tendency is to skip the bad news and get to the good news as quickly as possible. But a 'but God' that is not preceded by an honest reckoning with 'dead in trespasses and sins' is a shallow, easily forgotten 'but God.' Take the time. Sit with what you were. Let the darkness be dark enough that when the light comes it is genuinely blinding.

### 2. Know That Your Salvation Is Entirely God's Work -- and Let That Produce Gratitude, Not Passivity

Salvation is by grace through faith -- not from yourselves, not by works. Every component of salvation is God's gift. This does not produce passivity -- it produces

exactly the opposite. The person who fully understands that their salvation was entirely God's work, that they contributed nothing, that every spiritual blessing they possess came to them from outside themselves -- that person is not made passive. They are made grateful. And gratitude is the most powerful motivating force in the Christian life. We are God's handiwork, created for good works He prepared in advance. The grace that saved us was always grace that intended to be productive. The gratitude it generates is the fuel for the good works it designed.

### **3. Take the Unity of the Church as Seriously as the Gospel Takes It**

The one new humanity Paul describes in Ephesians 2 is not an aspiration -- it is a declaration of what the cross has accomplished. When the church is divided along racial lines, class lines, cultural lines, political lines -- when the walls that Christ demolished are quietly rebuilt inside the community of faith -- the church is contradicting the gospel. The cross that brought Jew and Gentile into one body did so at the cost of everything. To maintain or tolerate or make peace with division in the church is to treat the blood of Christ as though it did not accomplish what it accomplished. The unity of the church is not a secondary value to be pursued when more pressing matters are settled. It is a primary gospel reality to be protected and embodied.

### **4. Understand That You Are Being Built -- and Submit to the Process**

The church as a building under construction is one of the most practically illuminating images in the chapter. Construction is slow. It involves being cut, shaped, fitted, and sometimes placed in positions you would not have chosen for yourself. Other stones are fitted next to you that you may find uncomfortable, challenging, or unlike yourself in ways that require you to be shaped differently to accommodate them. This is not a failure of the building process -- it is the building process. The Spirit is doing something in the communal, sometimes uncomfortable work of fitting different people together. The question is not whether you find it easy. The question is whether you are submitting to the Master Builder's design.

### **5. Live as What You Are -- The Dwelling Place of God**

The most practically transforming truth of this chapter is its closing declaration. You -- plural, corporate, together -- are a dwelling place of God by His Spirit. When you gather as the church, God is home. This should change how you think about the gathered community. The Sunday gathering is not primarily a service designed to meet your needs or inspire your emotions or give you a spiritual boost for the week. It is the assembly of the people in whom God has chosen to dwell -- the holy temple in the Lord, the dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Come to the gathering with that awareness. Serve in the community with that awareness. Love the other living stones with that awareness. You are the temple. God is dwelling here. Let everything about your life in the community reflect the dignity and the holiness and the joy of that extraordinary reality.

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## How This Chapter Relates to Today

Ephesians 2 speaks with direct and urgent relevance into a contemporary culture -- and a contemporary church -- that is deeply fractured along every conceivable line of human difference. The political, racial, economic, generational, and cultural divisions of the present moment are as sharp and as deeply felt as anything the ancient world experienced between Jew and Gentile. And the contemporary church, rather than being the demonstration of the one new humanity that the cross created, has in many contexts been shaped by those divisions rather than shaping them.

Ephesians 2 does not offer a social strategy for achieving unity. It offers a theological reality from which unity must flow. The church is one -- not because its members have worked out their differences, not because they have found enough common ground to coexist, not because they have committed to tolerance and diversity -- but because they have been brought near by the blood of Christ, made alive together by the grace of God, built together on the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone, and indwelt by the same Spirit. The unity is already given. The work is to live it -- to refuse the re-erection of dividing walls that the cross demolished, to embody the one new humanity in concrete, costly, daily acts of cross-cultural, cross-class, cross-everything love.

The watching world is asking whether the gospel is real. One of the most powerful answers to that question is a church that is genuinely, visibly, beautifully diverse and genuinely, visibly, beautifully united -- a community that could not possibly have been assembled by any human social force, because the distances between its members are too great for anything but the blood of Christ to have bridged them. Ephesians 2 says: that community is possible. More than possible -- it is already theologically real. The question is whether the church will believe it enough to live it.

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### **Closing Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for Ephesians chapter 2 -- for its unflinching diagnosis of what we were and its breathtaking declaration of what You have made us. Dead -- but made alive. Under wrath -- but recipients of mercy. Far from You -- but brought near by the blood of Your Son. Strangers and foreigners -- but now citizens, family members, living stones in Your holy temple.*

*Lord, do not let us rush past what we were. Let the memory of death in trespasses and sins, of following the ways of this world, of being by nature deserving of wrath -- let that memory stay vivid enough to keep our gratitude alive and our boasting silenced. We have nothing to boast in. Everything we are and everything we have is the gift of Your grace. We are Your handiwork -- the poem You wrote in Christ Jesus. Let us live like it.*

*And Lord, produce in us the unity that the cross has already purchased. Where we have rebuilt the dividing walls that Christ demolished -- between races, between classes, between cultures, between generations -- forgive us, and then give us the courage and the love to tear them down again. Let the one new humanity that You created in Christ*

*be visible in our communities -- not as an aspiration we are moving toward, but as a reality we are living out.*

*Finally, Lord -- let us live with the awareness of what we are. We are Your dwelling place. You are at home in Your church. Let everything about how we gather, how we serve, how we love one another, how we welcome the stranger, reflect the dignity and the holiness of being the place where You have chosen to live.*

*Dwell in us. Make Your home among us. Fill Your temple with Your glory -- not the glory of human achievement or institutional success, but the glory of grace upon grace upon grace, displayed in a community that could only have been assembled by You, held together by nothing less than the blood of Your Son, and inhabited by nothing less than Your own Spirit. To You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*