



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

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Salvation: Personal and Corporate Ephesians 2:1-22

All Scripture is inspired by God. But some passages that are deeper and richer than others.

This marvelous text in Ephesians 2 is one of those. It's like a mine filled with veins of gold, silver, and all kinds of precious stones. There are so many powerful, glorious truths here that it's hard to choose which one to focus on. But let's mine for the gold this morning!

In the first chapter of this letter Paul describes God's eternal purpose and how He has accomplished and is accomplishing it in His Son, Jesus Christ. In this second chapter Paul moves into the body of the letter focusing more specifically on God's purpose in Christ and how He is working it out through His salvation of both individual believers personally and of the church corporately. In other words, he is showing how *in Christ, God is saving individuals and making them a people for Himself.*

Salvation as personal redemption

In verses 1-10, Paul focuses on salvation as *personal redemption*. By His grace, God saves us through His Son Jesus Christ and what He has done through His life, death on the cross, and resurrection. Jesus demonstrated God's kingdom rule in His life. Through His death He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sin, and conquered Satan, sin, and death. The Father raised Him in victory and vindication, and exalted Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly realms. And through all this, He saves us, forgiving our sin and guilt, freeing us from our sin, and setting us in a right relationship with God that is lived out in a life of righteous works.

Now this truth that God saves us by His grace through Christ and what He has accomplished cuts across the grain of our human nature. So many don't understand, to begin with, our *need for salvation*, for being saved from our sin. Rather than accepting the reality that apart from Christ we are sinners separated from and in rebellion against God, lost and bound in our sin, we want to offer explanations that put the blame on somebody else besides ourselves. We prefer the revised lyrics of "Amazing Grace," as the late cartoonist Doug Marlette once offered them in an episode of his *Kudzu* comic strip:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a stunted self-concept like me!
I once was stressed out, but now am empowered,
Was visually challenged, but now I see.

We know that there's something wrong, but it's hard to accept that we're *sinners*.

But that's *exactly* what we are! And Paul states it in no uncertain terms. He doesn't argue the point or try to prove it; he just *declares* it: **And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . (2:1).**¹

He goes on to remind his readers that this was how they used to live. They **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[®])**. When Paul says **you** in this text, he's referring specifically to Gentiles who have become Christians. But then he includes the Jewish Christians as well in verses 3-4:

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Then he turns to what God has done for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. He says that **God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He has loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ . . . (2:4-5)**. He goes on to declare that God has **raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus** in order to display **the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (2:6-7)**.

Then he sums it up this way (2:9-10):

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

This was all by His grace, not our good works or merit!

We don't deserve this salvation. We could never earn it. What we deserve is eternal death. Paul put it this way in Romans 6:23—**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

God freely loves us and saves us, turning us to Himself in repentance and faith. It's like a Dennis the Menace comic strip that ran years ago. As Dennis and his buddy Joey are walking away from Mrs. Wilson eating a cookie, Dennis says, "Mrs. Wilson gives you a cookie because she's nice, not because you're nice."

It's just that simple. It's not anything good that we've done, it's because of God's goodness and amazing grace and love. He redeems us through Christ, unites us with Christ, and the best is yet to come!

And once He redeems us, He has a plan for us in this life. He intends for us to walk in the way of good works that He's prepared for us (2:10). He's not just saving us from hell and the punishment for our sin. He's saving us from the power of sin in our lives. He wants to demonstrate His transforming power in us for all to see!

He's done all this in His Son, Jesus Christ. And the way we receive it is as *a free gift* through faith in Christ. That faith is accompanied by repentance—a change of mind and heart so that we turn from our own way to God and His ways, taking Him at His word, trusting Jesus as our Lord. As someone has put it, faith is the *channel*, not the cause. We're saved *through* faith, not *because of* faith. We can't do anything to achieve salvation; we simply have to accept it, taking God at His word, trusting Him to do what He says He will do. And this involves submission to Jesus as our Lord and King, dependence on Him as Savior, and commitment to God's purpose. This

submission, dependence, and commitment result in a changed lifestyle as God works in us through His Holy Spirit to transform us, making us like Christ. *It's God who brings it all about.* Everything that He's done for us, He's done in Christ! Have you put your trust in Him?

Salvation as corporate redemption

Now at this point in his letter, Paul moves to talk about the big picture, the broader scope of what God is doing in Christ. He's not only redeeming and saving *individuals*; He's saving and redeeming *a people* for Himself! But unlike his redemption of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, now He is redeeming individuals *from among both Jews and Gentiles*, and creating in Himself as the body of Christ **one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace** (NIV[®]) and **reconciling them both in one body to God through the cross**, thus putting the hostility to death (2:15b-16).

In the ancient world, ethnic divisions were every bit as much a reality as they are in our contemporary world, and nowhere was this more evident than with the division between Jews and Gentiles. A Gentile was, of course, anyone who wasn't a Jew, either by birth or conversion. The truth is that this particular division was so intense that our own racial and ethnic tensions are relatively mild in comparison. To a great degree, this was all rooted in the basic Jewish *misunderstanding* of what it meant to be God's people. The Old Testament made it clear that they were to be a light to the nations, pointing them to God. Yet many Jews' understanding degenerated into a very exclusive view that "we are God's people, so we must be better than everybody else!"

Within the temple of Jesus and Paul's day, the division between Jew and Gentile was clear. Gentiles were allowed in the outermost court, but *only* there. In fact, there was a Greek inscription that warned that any Gentile who went any farther would be taking his life into his own hands, subjecting Himself to the punishment of death!²

But in Christ, God is redeeming a people for Himself from *every* tongue and tribe and nation! That wall of partition separating Jews and Gentiles in access to God has been broken down in Christ through His cross!

Do you remember the commercial that ran over and over after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks? Americans of European, African, Native-American, Asian, and a Hispanic descent, sometimes with very different accents, all looking very different, one after another said very simply, "*I am an American.*"

That's how Paul understood what God is doing in Christ. There is no longer Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female, but all believers are one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28)—no Jewish Christians, no Gentile Christians, just *Christians*! Christ is our peace, our wholeness, whether we're Jewish or Gentile. He has reconciled *both* in one body by his cross, so that now *both* have access by one Spirit to the Father!

"So," Paul says to his readers, who were predominantly Gentile before their conversion (and to us!), "remember that once you were far off from God and His people, without Christ, alienated from citizenship in Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, without God! You were strangers and foreigners, dwelling outside God's household. But now—now, in Christ, who is our peace, you are brought near! You now have peace with God and access to Him by His Spirit, and you are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of God's household, His family! And you're being built into a holy temple in the Lord to be His dwelling place in the Spirit!"³

Paul makes an interesting transition in his metaphor, from a body (a living organism) to a household (a family) to a house (a building, but one that is growing as if a living organism). In

fact, in Greek, Paul uses *five words* whose root has to do with the act of building or with a building or a house.

What does this house Paul begins to describe look like? Well, it's built on a solid foundation—the apostles (the eyewitnesses and authoritative interpreters of Jesus and what God has done in Him) and prophets (inspired preachers in the early church who interpreted God's will for the present to the church), with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone, so that the whole building is both shaped and sustained by Him. On this foundation, the whole building, *with all its various parts*, is being joined together in unity so that it grows as a dynamic organism into a holy temple in the Lord, being built as a home for God on earth where He dwells by His Spirit.

Did you hear that? From these redeemed Gentiles and Jews who were once so hostile to each other and to God, He is building Himself a *home*, a place to dwell! It's not a "multi-purpose" building, like so many today. It has only one purpose: it is *a temple*, set apart to be *His home*! He is not building it out of blocks or bricks, but out of believers in Jesus Christ—not just Jewish believers or Gentile believers or American believers or any other particular brand of believers—but out of *all believers* from all nations and all walks of life! It is a place on earth to meet God, to experience God and His presence and peace and reconciliation, a place of *access* to God. Paul uses the language of a building, but it's believers that God is building into His temple!

What a grand construction project! God is taking imperfect, sinful human beings whom He has redeemed, and with them, He is building Himself *a temple, a home*. He is the architect, the engineer, and the builder. And although it's not yet complete, He's already moved in!

And so as Tim Keller has put it: "Here's the gospel: you're more sinful than you ever dared believe; you're more loved than you ever dared hope."⁴ And to that I would add, you have a family—God's family—as He includes those He redeems into His household in Christ!

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®.

² <https://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/israel/temple-warning.html> (accessed July 19, 2018).

³ My paraphrase.

⁴ Tim Keller, in the sermon *Treasure Versus Money*, <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/march/7030210.html> (accessed July 19, 2018).